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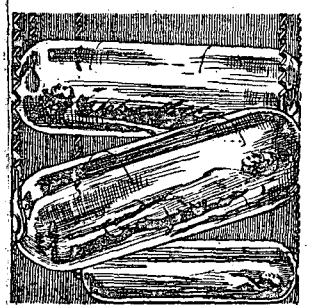

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Cover Painting by Earle Bergey—Illustrating "The Sleeper Is a Rebel"

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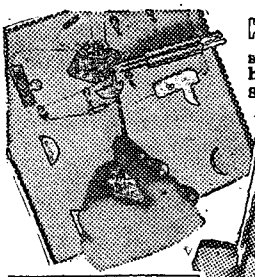

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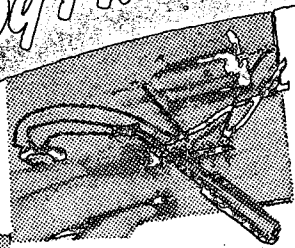

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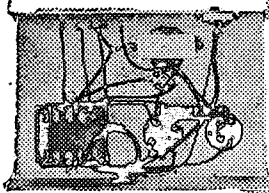

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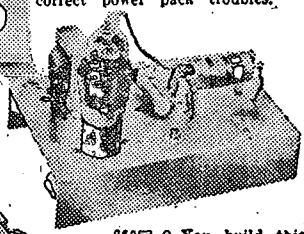

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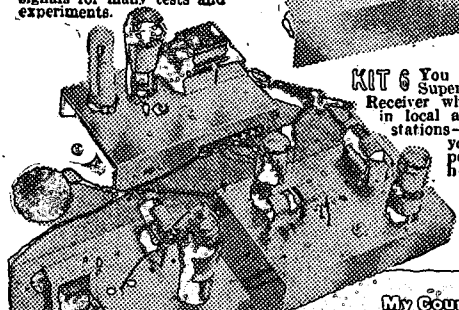

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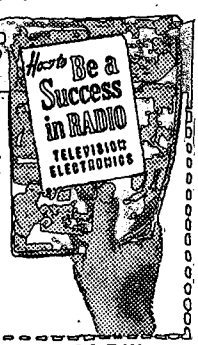

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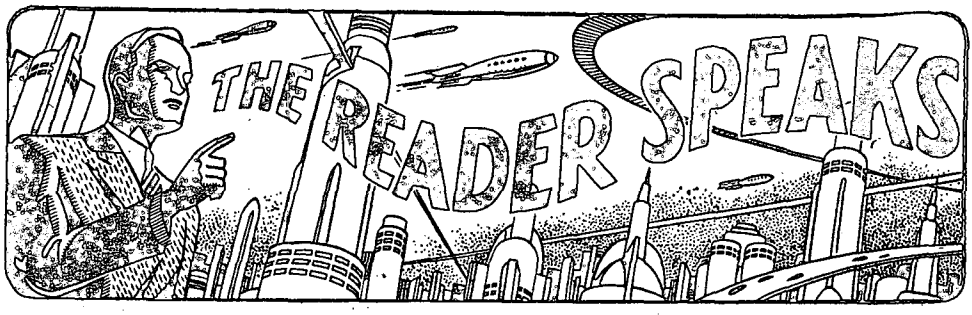

A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

MANY thousands of studious folk, from philosophers to psychologists, and many more millions of less lettered humanity, have pondered through the ages over the factors that differentiate man from the so-called lower animals.

Some hold out for the soul, others for the ability to reason, others for the opposed thumb. Probably, outside of the supreme arrogance of assigning a soul only to homo sapiens, they all have a case. Certainly man *can* reason and through reasoning create, if only to his own destruction—and certainly he does make use of his opposed thumb, if only to push buttons or use it as a finger-waggling fulcrum when applied to the tip of his nose.

Our hunch, however, is that the greatest distinction between man and beast lies in his ability to extract mirth from purely intellectual concepts.

Everyone who has had a dog or a cat knows that these animals "laugh." In their own methods they can and do indicate high amusement at situations that tickle their risibilities. But their "laughter," like much human guffawing, is born in the physical discomfort or discomfiture of others—good old buffoonery or slapstick. Ability to find mirth in ideas is perhaps humanity's one claim to Godhead.

Humor in Science Fiction

All this is given rise to by an irksome frequent note obtained in letters written to this column—epitomized by a too-frequent reaction to Henry Kuttner's EXIT THE PROFESSOR in our October issue—that humor has no place in science fiction.

We thought the appallingly atomic Hogbens were a howl of the first ululation. The impact of such astonishingly gifted beings upon an encroaching society is truly and horrendously comic. EXIT THE PROFESSOR and its sequels, by this imaginative juxtaposition, provide satire of a very high and very funny order indeed.

Humor, basically, is nothing more than a sense of relative proportion—above all one applied to the possessor of such a sense himself. It is the ability of a human being to see himself truly in correct relationship to his fellows, his surroundings and the vast universe about him. It is death to egotism and therefore anathema to tyrants and all other human monsters.

If it has no place in science fiction, then Allah save science fiction.

The Tragic Note

In a recent national magazine article, a famous European literary figure deplored the fact that the United States has no innate sense of tragedy. This, he claimed, was something akin to a national disaster, since it made us undignified in the eyes of the rest of the world and put us generally out of step with the company of nations.

We hope he was right. Even a brief study of the tormented human history of any of the powers of Europe or Asia brings conviction that such a record of restriction, humiliation and terror is something of which we have had no part and wish none for the future.

A sense of tragedy is no more than fatalistic acceptance of top-drawer distortion of a true sense of relative values—distortion of the sort that produced the highly intellectual, honorable and, for that reason all the more terrible Terror of the French Revolution. People aware of their own true life roles and of those of their fellows would never submit to leadership or conquest by a Ghengis Khan, an Attila or a Hitler.

They would, as so many millions have, prefer to die. There is nothing more ridiculous than the posturings and automatic cruelties of a man who sets himself above his fellows. Leadership by such a person is a travesty of civilization—is therefore only excusable for savages. For it is not a comic travesty.

(Continued on page 8)

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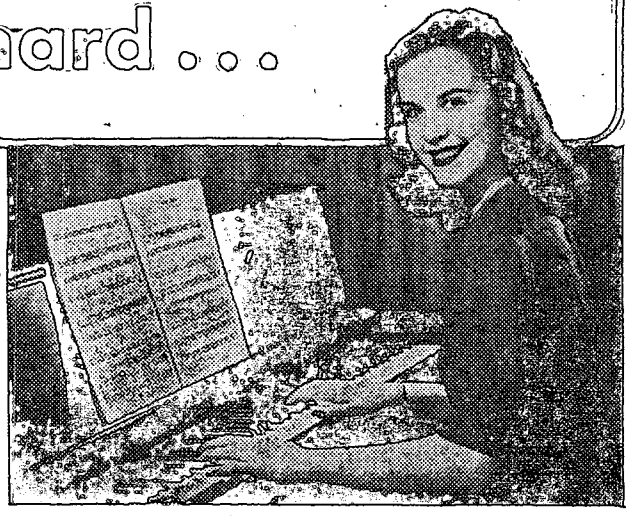
To those who think LEARNING MUSIC is hard . . .



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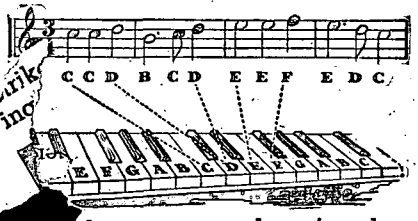

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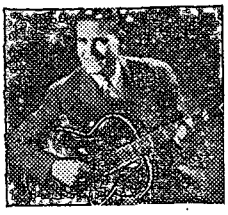

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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

That amorphous collection of people and enterprises dedicated to human entertainment known as shown business offers an excellent index of the value of tragedy against comedy or vice versa.

A Distortion of Values

Critics, of course, have a strong tendency to kowtow to the most trivial and tawdry tragic themes as "art"—while dismissing comedy as unimportant. It seems to us that this curious distortion of values is caused by the fact that, to be a critic in most cases, a man must consider himself fit to tell his fellows what they should and should not see. In other words and in microcosm, a tyrant.

But show business pays off and is paid off at the box office with funds provided for the most part by a public without pretentions other than knowing what it likes. It is encouraging therefore that the performers who earn the most money are comedians—men like Benny, Allen, the late W. C. Fields and many scores of others. The fact is that people like to laugh.

Perhaps because comedy is a t[illegible] than tragedy, it is far more difficult to [illegible] an audience roll in the aisles than to [illegible] the tears down its collective cheeks. The [illegible] gag about the clown who wants to p[lay] Hamlet is not necessarily funny. The chanc[es] are that he could do a better job as [the] Melancholy Dane than the average [tra]gedian could do in clown's makeup.

There should be no shame in laughte[r]; basically it is the ability to see ourselves [as] others see us. Tragedy, on the other hand along with self-importance, implies the i[n]ability to face the true purport of the inn[er] compulsions that move too many of us.

So let us lift a foaming beaker to more and louder laughter in science fiction!

OUR NEXT ISSUE

A VETERAN of the science fiction wars returns to the fray victoriously with the featured novel in the TWS April issue—namely Arthur Leo Zagat with a stirring vision of the shape of things to come entitled THE FACELESS MEN.

This is a story of the post-atomic world—when the inherent perils of the source of human technical advances have created what amounts to a scientific police state on technocratic lines. But no matter how scientific and foolproof such a civilization may be-

(Continued on page 10)

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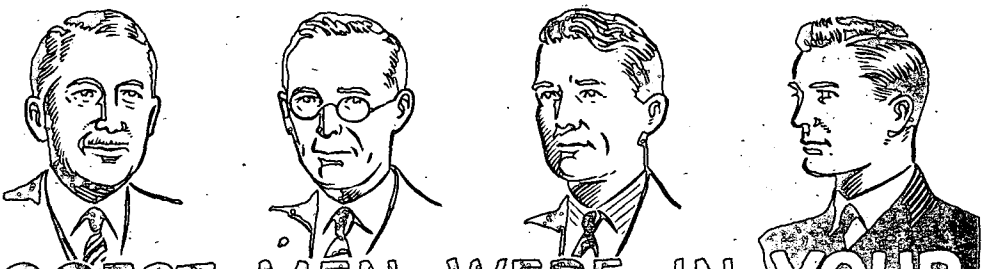

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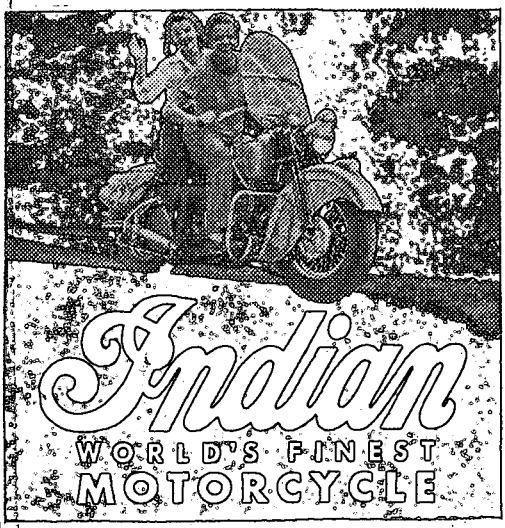

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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 8)

come, the men who press the buttons and check the gauges of the atomic piles are men—and therefore anything can happen.

Brad Lilling, brilliant young scientist with a spotless record finds this out when he is unjustly accused of attempting the radium-assassination of a visitor to the power plant in which he works—the visitor being no less a personage than Joan Arlen, daughter of the all-powerful Administrator of Region Three, the globe's northwest quadrant.

While Brad has been aware of discontent among his fellow scientists at the arbitrary powers which govern them, he has not been expecting to be drawn into the vortex of as complex a whirlpool of revolt and counter revolution as has ever plagued humanity. Furthermore, it is his ill fortune to become a focal point in the struggle without really knowing the issues involved.

Lilling learns the hard way and is ultimately instrumental in bringing events to a stirring climax. The perilous path of his learning and its resolution make THE FACELESS MEN a novel readers are not likely soon to forget.

First of two novelets is by another friend, Frank Belknap Long, and is called THE WORLD OF WULKINS. Trouble here is started by the two children of Ralph and Molly Denham, who feel impelled to buy a rusty, bargain-priced robot standing in dilapidated splendor in an antique shop window.

They name their new toy Wulkins and consider it an object for much sport and games until they discover that Wulkins is not really a robot at all, but the emissary of an alien world whose intentions are far from honorable. Wulkins, in fact, becomes something of a domestic problem.

Before his dismissal from the Denham household is finally achieved, Wulkins has projected the Denhams, house, household et al., into his own world, which proves to be a sort of chamber of horrors as far as Tellurian sensitivities are concerned.

Long has here come up with a novelet of logical magic and horror calculated to put a fright wig on even the baldest of pates!

Second novelet of the issue is Arthur J. Burks' THIEVES OF TIME. In this, he goes beyond the atomic to the electronic world, where man, having achieved control of the microcosm, is able to inflict a host of new wonders and terrors upon his own kind.

Against a background of Amazonian Brazil in the not-too-distant future, this is a tale so exotic of background and idea that even the hardest-shelled reader of science

(Continued on page 93)

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What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy. Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as fundamental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the "Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis," abbreviated by the initials "AMORC." The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a non-profit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

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Sincere men and women, in search of the truth—those who wish to fit in with the ways of the world—are invited to write for a complimentary copy of the sealed booklet, "The Mastery of Life." It tells how to contact the librarian of the archives of AMORC for this rare knowledge. This booklet is not intended for general distribution; nor is it sent without request. It is therefore suggested that you write for your copy to Scribe J. M. B.

The ROSICRUCIANS
[AMORC]
San Jose California

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TOM STOPPED THE RUNAWAY AND THEN . . .
WATCHED BY HER DAD AND A PASSERBY, "BABS" WEBB IS GIVING HER FAVORITE TROTTER HIS MORNING WORKOUT WHEN . . .
STEADY, JEB!
JUMP, BABS!
THE FEAR-CRAZED ANIMAL SNAPS A REIN AND GALLOPS BLINDLY AT THE FENCE
WHOA, BOY! IT'S ALL OVER.
WHEW! THAT WAS CLOSE. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, BABS?
YES, THANKS TO MISTER . . .
TOM ADAM'S MY NAME. JUST DRIVING THROUGH
LUNCH? YOU'RE VERY KIND, BUT I'M HARDLY PRESENTABLE. BEEN DRIVING SINCE MIDNIGHT AND . . .
YOU CAN CLEAN UP AT THE CLUB. COME ON
AND HERE'S MY RAZOR
THIS BLADE'S A SWEETHEART! MY FACE FEELS GREAT!
TOUGH WHISKERS ARE NO PROBLEM FOR THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE PLENTY KEEN
I WISH YOU COULD SEE ME DRIVE IN THE CLUB HANDICAP THIS SATURDAY
HE'S CERTAINLY HANDSOME
SATURDAY? TRY AND KEEP ME AWAY!
YOU'LL FIND SHAVING IS QUICKER, EASIER AND MORE REFRESHING WITH THIN GILLETTES. NO OTHER LOW-PRICED BLADE IS SO KEEN AND SO LONG LASTING. AND, FURTHERMORE, THIN GILLETTES PROTECT YOU FROM THE IRRITATION AND DISCOMFORT CAUSED BY MISFIT BLADES BECAUSE EVERY THIN GILLETTE IS MADE TO FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY. TO GET REAL SHAVING SATISFACTION . . . USE THIN GILLETTES
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As Deker retrieved his sword, the long lancet smacked, stuck into the albino's twitching back

The Sleeper Is a Rebel

By BRYCE WALTON

Because he is branded a misfit, Deker volunteers for Nirvana—which brings him surcease for eons—but at each awakening he is again tormented by evil reality!

CHAPTER I

Surrender

WITH bitter resignation Deker faced the two immaculately clothed Psych Staffmen. His figure was gaunt, wild, that of a savage anachronism. His dirt-caked face cracked in a wry smile. The staffmen's faces showed fear.

"I'm surrendering," Deker said. "I thought I could live alone, but I couldn't. My abnormality isn't that kind."

Their fears of violence placated, the two Psychos led him to the small waiting gyro. He sat between them and watched the wild expanse of forest diminish beneath them as they headed for City Three. It had been a

A NOVEL OF THE FUTURE

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dangerous freedom in the sea of unsullied North American forest, living precariously from what he could squeeze from a well-stocked but selfish Nature. He had almost starved for a while, until he had learned the rudiments of survival.

And then—the brooding loneliness.

Man cannot live alone. He is a social animal. But Deker was also an off-sized cog, a misfit that would never find a place in the perfectionistic mechanism of the Hundred Cities Utopian Federation.

"You will volunteer for the Experimental Labs of course," the man on his right said. "Scientist Brenn needs volunteers. I can't understand why you haven't accepted Nirvana before this, Deker! Ordinarily, an Abnormal is more than willing to accept it. It's for the good of the Federation, you know!"

"I know," said Deker acrimoniously.

The Federation was the only thing that mattered. A lone, maladjusted pariah labeled Deker didn't matter. From the time the individuals of the Federation were artificially semenated, placed in a row of generation jars in the Embryo wards, they were conditioned to take their predestined place in the social machinery.

But if an abnormality, a misfit, appeared he was tolerated, though socially ostracized, psychologically forced to volunteer to be done away with, legally. "Nirvana"—a kind, soft word for extermination.

They didn't kill you, for such a thing would be unthinkable in the perfect order. One slept, was put to permanent gelid sleep in Brenn's encystment capsule. Deker had tried to escape. But there was no escape for an *abnormal*. Nothing but Nirvana. . . .

DEKER STOOD, looking across a gleaming desk at the head of the Psych Council for City Three. From having been here for consultation many times before, Deker knew this man's name as Jak. He was eighty years old, though his voice and face were still young, virile, enthusiastic. The Conditioners did well.

"You surrendered voluntarily," Jak said, his eyes unwaveringly on Deker's. "It's fortunate that your ill-advised attempt to escape ended so amicably."

Deker's thin lips curled. "I wonder if you've considered the fact that your 'perfect' system is responsible for me, an imperfection?"

"Of course. But this is only Twenty-one-sixty A.D. At this early stage we must expect incidental imperfections. The Federation is only two centuries old. It's the glorious whole of our Hundred Cities one must consider. A little too much thyroxine injection, or a slight irregularity in the saltine schedule, and you resulted. A martyr to the ultimate planned perfection of the Hundred Cities! If only you had reacted properly to the Conditioners!"

Deker walked to the great window overlooking Bellamy Square. Yes, outwardly it was Bellamy's Utopian dream. But . . . He turned back toward Jak.

"For five years I forced myself to be a lathe worker. But I hated it. So to compensate, I illegally studied books, all the books I could get, and that made me even more maladjusted. You speak of perfection! But we're physico-chemical structures. We're variable, subject to unpredictable alterations. I'm one of many abnormals decanted from the wards. Perhaps only small insignificant errors. But you have no way of foreseeing or preventing big errors, Jak! It's [illegible] veneering. A house of glittering soun[illegible]

Jak shook his head sadly. "Too bad the[illegible] don't proceed with the space-flight development. A splendid release for your type. But no benefit to the Federation, so it must be dropped. However, I'm glad you've volunteered for Nirvana. Brenn badly needs more subjects for his suspended animation experiments."

Deker remembered then how desperately they had tried to correct their decanting error by reconditioning processes. The individual was conditioned from prenatal stage on to perform specific tasks in the social machinery, and he was also conditioned to think that specific task simply wonderful. But not for Deker. He was too negativistic. The machinery droning over and over into his brain, month after futile month those words:

"The lathe worker is the most necessary worker in the Federation. No other worker is so important as those who operate the lathes. I'm proud to be a lathe worker." Or: "I'm so very, very glad I'm a lathe worker." Or again: "I could never, never be anything but a lathe worker."

Deker looked at Jak. "You labeled me a negativist. Because after five years of that, I decided that being a lathe worker was about the most sorry job a human being could have, in this socialized futility."

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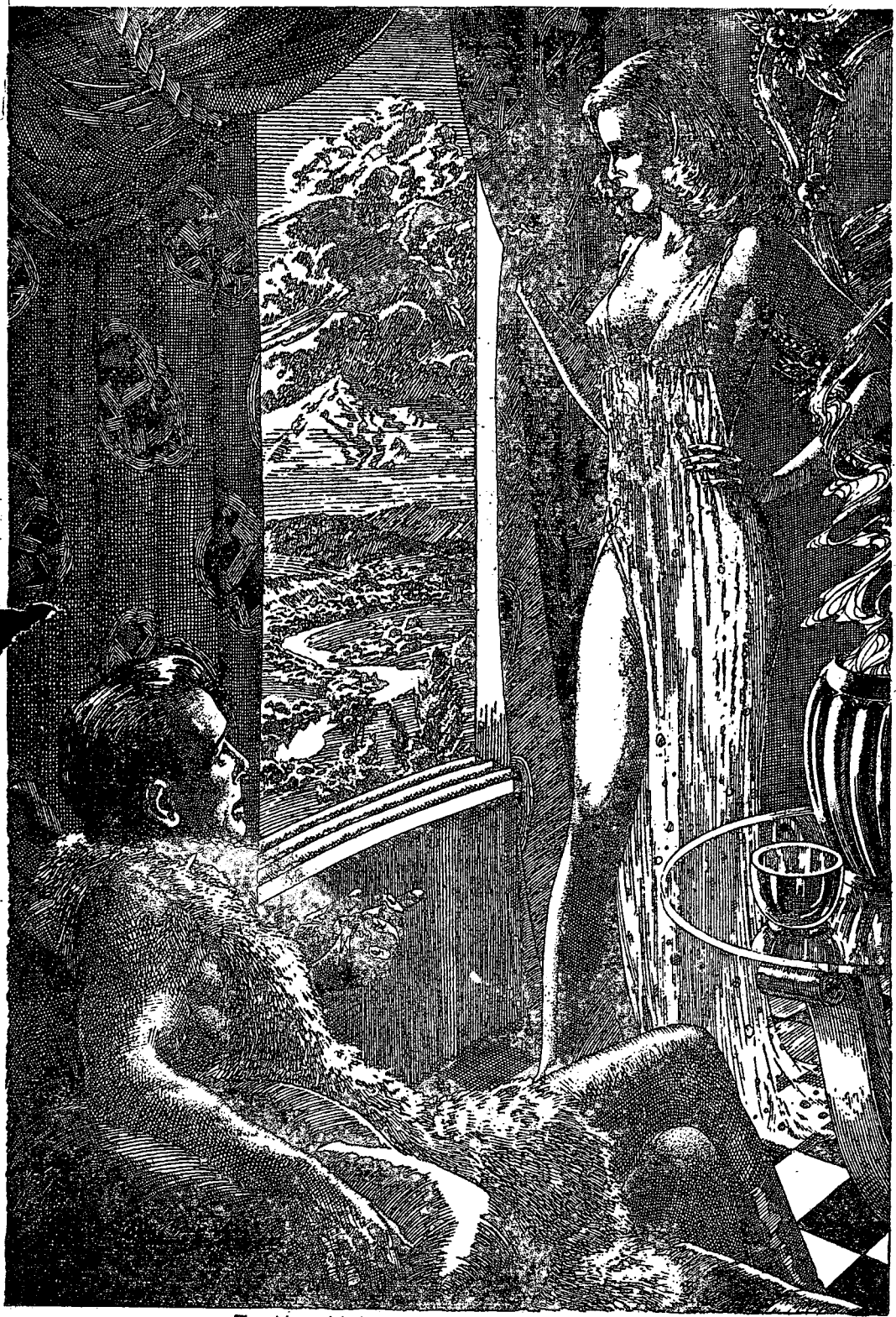

The girl stood looking out of the window of her sanctum

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Jak exuded sympathy from his clear eager eyes.

"For you, yes," he agreed. "That's why it is best for you and the Federation that you accept Nirvana. It's too bad, really, that the Federation cannot use you. Potentially, you have a high-A mental capacity. But you've destroyed any possibility of specialization by the secret studying you did during those years you worked on your lathe. Generalized knowledge is dead."

After an empty, painful silence Deker said: "I'm ready to go, Jak. I've never even been smiled at by a woman and my life's a third gone. I think that has decided me more than anything else. Imagine how you would feel if every woman stared and shied away from you as though you were some kind of animal out of a zoo!"

Jak coughed, motioned. The two staffmen entered.

"Good-by, Deker," Jak said. "You may go into the experimental labs happily, knowing you are contributing to the ultimate and eternal glory of the Federation."

Deker walked out between them, was taken to the scientist, Brenn. Enroute, he saw or heard little because of a shock-absorbing haze of amnesia. A haze that broke immediately when he met Brenn for the first time and became aware of a startling, stunning fact:

Brenn, himself, was an Abnormal!

Brenn was motioning nervously about his laboratory, after the two staffmen had left. Motioning at the elaborate machinery, the time-encystment capsules suspended from the ceiling like pendular streamlined coffins.

SMALL, erratic, in soiled plastic working gown, Brenn was a man whose eyes gleamed with secrecy. Small, blue-veined hands twisted constantly. Deker couldn't believe it. Brenn, one of the Federation's top ranking research psych-physicists, an Abnormal! Surely the Class One Intellectuals knew!

"You recognize me for what I am, Deker," Brenn said. "So do they. But they can't prove it, officially. But I'm a different kind of Abnormal than you and these others asleep in my capsules. Mine isn't a result of physiological error during embryo or prenatal. In spite of the Conditioners, I developed high degree insight and free agency. I've been able to conceal my abnormality deliberately and make a socially acceptable adjustment. You could have done the same—with insight," He added with a sly wink, "*Many have.*"

Brenn commenced pacing the length of the time-vault.

"I've explained to the others before I put them in stasis," he said. "I can explain to you now."

Deker dropped down on an alloy bench, slightly dizzy with amazement.

"Deker," Brenn went on, "you have probably realized that the Federation is a silly dream punctured with holes. The fabric glitters, but it's false."

Deker nodded. The scientist continued in a grave tone:

"Created out of desperation because of the sudden mastery of basic energies, the World Federation seeks final standardization, socialization, as the only defense against self-annihilation. That's wrong. It will be solved by individual development or not at all. At any time incurable inherent factors in human nature may spawn a will-to-power fanatic who, with knowledge of basic energy, can destroy all our wonderful Hundred Cities overnight. There are, for example, the Anarchs."

Deker started at Brenn, his amazement growing.

"You're surprised that there actually is an underground organization of Anarchs? So would be many others. And there may be other organizations and individuals who are not a part of the Federated system. Destructives. That's why I'm working with my experiments here in suspended animation. You sleepers may survive the disaster."

Deker looked around as Brenn paused. Eleven capsules were suspended from the low metal ceiling. Inside each capsule, a body, a freak, an Abnormal from prenatal and embryo wards. Each body would live, unaging, while it was administered to properly. Suspended animation.

"You see," said Brenn, enjoying the dramatic effect. "I'm responsible for you. For you and those others here in the capsules. I intentionally caused your abnormalities!"

Deker was immunized now to shock. He only blinked.

"By my Class One rating," explained Brenn, "I have been legally admitted to the embryo wards whenever I desired. Secretly I caused the alterations in certain normally developing embryos. I caused teratological freaks to emerge instead of sponges for the colorless liquids poured from the condition-

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ing machines. Physically, I'll admit some of the results are ugly." He indicatel the hanging capsules. "In that capsule sleeps a two-headed man. There, a hunchback; and there, a Cyclopean monster with three eyes and a ferocious temper. There is an albino, a trembling raw lump of sensitivity. There is one who almost sprouted wings and became a birdman. Like you, some are only mentally distorted. Remember the woman, Shar, who tried to commit suicide? She's here."

Deker couldn't hate Brenn. Even being a twisted freak was preferable to being a mindless child of the Conditioners, happy because of a total lack of free associative thought.

"Individuals and organizations like the Anarchs," said Brenn, "could destroy all the Hundred Cities of Utopia overnight. Civilization as we recognize it now may not survive. But my hope is that you will. This vault is surrounded by tons of protective sheeting. I needed subjects for this experiment in suspended animation, and used the only legal method there was for obtaining them."

"And you?" asked Deker.

"No importance. I will die. Humanity must persist! That's the only thing that matters. The position of humans will at times become so precarious that survival will seem impossible. But humanity will keep driving forward, Deker. It must. I'm putting my faith in that."

Brenn explained something about the encystment principle. Temperature mean down to 7.1 degrees centigrade. Could go on living indefinitely. Human organism a chemical complex. His life short and fast, because it's hot. But all these suspended sleepers were cold, cold.

But Deker had lost interest. He was tired. He wanted escape. Nirvana. And later, outstretched within the capsule, he hardly realized that his consciousness was beginning to fade.

A sharp strange odor closed over his face like a sticky gas. Brilliant flashes of light circled round and round his head like bursting novae. He was swimming in a pool of dark red. It was like blood, only it was thin and wonderfully cool. Slowly and more slowly he swam until he was floating weightless, looking up into an endlessly swirling green mist.

Then somewhere a bell clanged loudly. It rang three times.

CHAPTER II

The Gods Awake

DEKER floated on the red sea long after he began hearing the bell. And he knew that the key threshold which Brenn had left open for activation had been stimulated. Sometime later, he was fully conscious.

He stretched his body, felt the strong new pumping of blood that had been flowing with such infinite slowness. Flooding oxygen lifted him to his elbows with a dizzy exuberance. He pressed a stud, and the cowling above the capsule slid back noiselessly. Deker climbed out onto the vault floor.

One by one the others were climbing from their capsules, transforming the metal-lined vault abruptly into a weird distorted nightmare. The hunchback swung his stocky, humped figure to the floor on enormous arms. He stood uncertainly a moment, running big hands through a bush of black hair. He smiled with sardonic humor on his gargoyle face, motioned with a sweeping gesture toward the others.

The two-headed man, both heads misshapen and ugly, groaned softly. He opened his two pairs of pain-raddled eyes, glared at Deker and the hunchback, then buried the eyes in thin pale arms.

"He's always in pain," the hunchback explained with easy friendliness. "They kept him doped with hypnosene for years before he finally consented to accept Nirvana. Nothing here in the vault to alleviate his pain. And who knows what's outside?"

The white-haired albino came hopping nervously across the floor, waving red hands, sighing with fear. The giant three-eyed man's middle eye was a bright, evil glare.

The manic-depressive, Shar, who had tried to commit suicide by jumping from City Three's highest building, walked past the Cyclops and stood close to Deker. Black, feverish eyes matched the shining black of her hair. Deker saw nothing except the moist full redness of her lips.

There were others—drab, colorless women, an insignificant little bald-headed man, and the man who had almost grown wings. But the slightly clothed figure of the woman, Shar, demanded most of Deker's attention.

"Who are you, friend?" the hunchback

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said in a deep rich basso. "I'm Gans."

"Deker." He walked a few steps back and forth, tentatively. Feeling was still coming into his limbs.

"No sign of Brenn, so at least we must have slept longer than he lived," suggested Shar in a deep, husky voice. She shifted her hips sinuously.

"Or maybe he's outside the vault," whispered Deker harshly, watching Shar. She also watched him. No woman had ever looked at Deker that way.

"True," said the hunchback. "These opaque sections allow the morbidly curious to see inside, though we can't see out. I wonder how long it's been?"

The distorted face grinned. And, surprisingly enough, he began to sing. A deep, droning chant. He began swinging his arms with the music. Shar undulated nearer Deker.

"Well"—her ripe lips curled with bitter malice—"Brenn's failed us."

Her arms swept round the interior of the vault. There were no openings in it other than the tightly-sealed series of three heavy metal doors. Deker could still hear the steady beat of the metronome.

"We're right back in reality again," she said and, with her eyes on Deker, she added softly, "But reality can be interesting, sometimes."

Deker shook off part of the woman's spell with an uneasy laugh.

"Reality," he said. "Only time gives it meaning. But for us—we could have been in suspended animation for ten seconds, or ten million years."

Shar looked at him oddly. "You came in here after we did. Did you volunteer for this trap?"

Deker's solid line of eyebrow wriggled like a caterpillar. "I volunteered. Finally."

The albino, squealing in high falsetto, scuttled across the floor.

"Listen, the metronome's stopped! That means the whole thing's quit!" He ran wildly around the base of the smooth walls, scurrying like a giant white rat.

"Take it easy, Red," cautioned Deker. "We can get out. They can see us in here, and we've been revived only a little while."

Shar slid over, leaned against him. He had never had a woman do that before. Not in reality.

The Cyclops shambled over toward him, his middle eye blazing anger, and Shar moved away, looking both frightened and pleased. Deker moved between Shar and the Cyclops. The middle eye shone with a blind insensate jealousy.

"Shar is mine," the Cyclops said sullenly. "Mine."

"Are you?" Deker asked Shar.

THE albino was huddled in a far corner. The hunchback was singing again. The two-headed man was sitting on the vault floor, a head in each hand, moaning.

"I don't belong to anyone," Shar replied. Her eyes blinked slowly at Deker. "Yet."

The metal door opposite Deker began sliding open slowly. Every eye turned toward it, each one breathlessly waiting. The lower half of the door was dark, the upper part of the oval a deep soft blue, and a little to the left of the horizon line, a full red moon shone. A cold wind entered, and the sparsely clothed freaks shivered. Otherwise nothing happened, then.

Standing there, Deker suffered a strange thrill. Things were so different now. Even a woman, Shar, desired him. Among these freaks he was certainly the most desirable in a physical sense. With sudden surging enthusiasm he realized that he had escaped!

They all undoubtedly were in a far future time now. And surely this new era, whenever and whatever it was, held new hope and promise for him!

"Everything's changed out there," squealed the frightened albino, nervously. "City Three was never cold. And we can see the sky, and the moon too. When we came into this vault we were buried in the very heart of City Three. Now we're in the open."

And the hunchback's deep voice sang. He improvised, sometimes in free verse, sometimes in rhyme, as the mood hit him:

The sky is blue with cold, and bitter is the wind.
The moon is red, blood-red is the moon.
The cold wind blows where once the City rose.
And what has happened to the world we knew?
Now, no one knows.

Staring at the hunchback, Deker felt something of the situation's timeless fantasy, the abnormality. Lost in time. Unsuited perhaps to any era except some legendary scene. This hunchback might be some sly jester from the court of an ancient king; the girl, Shar, a frustrated princess escaped from a

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tower. And the others, the teratological freaks, seemed part of a dusty mythology.

A wind sighed from the strange and otherwise silent world outside, bringing a cloud of fine dust. Shar cowered against Deker. Instinctively he held her tightly, felt deeply her warm, slightly tremulous flesh. It was difficult now to remember the Hundred Cities Utopian Federation. Dead, buried, forgotten, the perfect order. Or was it?

Then they heard the weird chanting of many voices outside the vault. The gong sounded again, much louder. Then the chanting rose to a fanatical droning dirge.

"Let's go," said Deker. He kept his arm about Shar and led the others toward the exit. But the Cyclops stayed beside Shar, eyes balefully on Deker. The others fell cowering behind, the albino moaning, the two-headed man stumbling with pain. There were fifty feet of metal passageway before they stood in the ruin of the final exit. The chanting stopped.

A single wailing voice intoned:

"The gods have awakened! Hail, all hail god Deker. Our salvation and our light!"

Deker peered through the moonlight. A thin, ragged figure stood before a mass of prone bodies that quivered with emotion like the surface of a lake. Behind them towered the jagged pattern of a colossal and terribly twisted ruins. The voice droned on:

"Hail to Him of the Three Eyes of the All-Seeing Vision! Hail to the Two-Headed One of Wisdom! Hail to the Dark Goddess! Hail to the Gnarled One, the Storm Chief! Hail to the White One who knows of the evil things that crawl beneath the Earth!

"Begin the sacrifice. Blood shall bathe the City's ruins. Offer up yourselves to the gods who have arisen to save us from—the beasts!"

A roar rose up from the bowed bodies.

"Hail the gods who will conquer the Beasts that Run in the Night!"

DEKER shivered against the cold wind and the brittle red moonlight. And against something he could not name. Shar trembled against him, and the hunchback ran a hairy hand over his thick lips.

To Deker's right, three bent peeled poles leaned together, supporting the huge gong. Two ragged figures stood beside it with clubs in their hands. It was difficult to make out details characterizing the horde groveling on the slope that stretched from the vault into a dark valley of warped metal and

Everything about her except the glossy, shining uniform was —Perl

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molten plastic. The vault was still covered with the mountain of protective sheeting. Brenn had indeed prepared well for the holocaust.

The small filthy-bearded man who had been exhorting the horde, ran and fell on his face at Deker's feet. The moonlight reflected his gleaming fanatical eyes. Eyes with little intelligence; only superstitious awe. An aged cracked voice climbed up in trembling ecstasy.

"God Deker of the City that Was, and of The City that Shall be Again, your people who have waited long for your awakening welcome you!"

He beat his forehead a number of times, then scurried crablike backward before turning and again facing the horde of kneeling worshipers.

"Let the sacrificial fires burn brighter than the moon!" he screamed. "There need never again be fear. The Temple Gods of Brenn will protect us!"

Deker turned toward the gnarled ruins in the valley. He shuddered as his eyes lost themselves among those starkly wrenched remains of what had once been the gleaming structures of City Three. His eyes probed blindly into the impenetrable blackness beyond.

He turned. Behind him the others were whispering, staring, stunned with inability to comprehend.

"Don't leave the vault yet," cautioned Deker, "until we make sure of what's going on."

The hunchback laughed heavily, then he sang again. Deker was shaken by the weird unreality of their circumstances as the man sang:

Out of the sable night of time
The dead gods rise to battle beasts and find
Salvation for the ragged ones who keep
The sacrificial flames afire!

The fires leaped into roaring life, blown into erratic patterns by the mountain winds. Strange contorted dances began. After a few moments of discussion on the part of the gods, two haggled creatures in roughly dyed robes of several brilliant colors, led the arisen sleepers to a crude platform of stones and metal overlooking the sacrificial ritual. It wasn't far from the vault, to which they could return if necessary.

From his Olympus, Deker and his godlings looked down.

CHAPTER III

The Beasts

THROUGH POOLS of red moonlight, hysterical screaming celebrants twisted and leaped. Altar fires flared and, in the light, showed the quivering faces of those who wailed with released fear. Around the altars, stones ran deep with the darkest red of all.

It was a far cry from the dignified perfection of City Three, yet these yammering savages were still human. And so was Deker. The wailing rhythm was a bitter-sweet poison in his brain. His blood ran hotly and his temples throbbed.

He looked at Shar. She was bent forward. Her face was high lighted shadow, flushed and terror-stricken with an instinctive fascination. The albino cringed with his pinkish hands on either side of his chin like a rat's paws. The two-headed man groaned, unimpressed by the ritual. He was too pain-raddled to care. In this savage environment, he couldn't survive long. But for that matter would any of them?

The hunchback, whom these savages had labeled "The Gnarled One, God of The Storm," swayed sensually to the pristine dirge. His long arms swung.

The "Temple Gods of Brenn" had been seated with Deker in front, Shar, the hunchback, and the Cyclops beside him, the others indistinct behind. Two high priests stood a few feet from Deker. He had questioned them. They chanted an alternating answer while the Cyclops kept his eyes fixed on Deker, waiting.

Priest I: "The lightning gods of the Anarchs brought their bolts from the skies and the great cities melted in the supernal sun fires."

Priest II: "Long have we waited for the awakening of the gods. Now shall the Anarchs die within their glowing shields."

Priest I: The Beasts that Run in the Night shall be driven back into the mountains beside the blue river and shall never again dare attack us and eat our women and children."

Priest II: "Faithfully the Priests of Brenn have kept the altar fires."

Priest I: "Protect us against the Anarchs and the Beasts and the Roaring Winds, and

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the Ice, and the Burning Death that comes from the Ruins."

Priest II: "We have fulfilled the Prophecy of Brenn. His temple has been kept inviolate. The cities of the Utopes shall reach again to the stars."

A wail of sonorous supplication rose in mighty chorus:

"Hail, all hail, the Temple Gods of Brenn!"

The high priests draped the gods in fur robes to protect them from the cold, a long-haired white one for Deker, a tawny yellow and black-striped skin for Shar. The alternating black matched the black of her eyes and the blue-black of her hair.

"Shar," said Deker, "this sickens me. I'm not atavistic enough to appreciate it."

Shar said nothing. Intently, unalterably fascinated by the bloody spectacle before her, she stared, and her fists were clenched, her full lips taut. Deker shrugged and shifted away from her, hardly knowing that he was doing it. There seemed to be something about this primitive libation that was fully appreciated by Shar's feminine masochism. She had been even more abnormal in that Utopian past than he. For even to him, self-destruction had been unthinkable. At least he had volunteered for Nirvana instead of being compelled to accept it. Shar was truly primitive.

Yet if all the feminine remains of the Hundred Cities were as these yammering troglodytes, then Shar was perhaps the only woman in the world for him. But he shook her from his immediate mind. The decay of the Federation had been only a matter of time and fate, as he had known. But what had contributed directly to the final devastation?

"The lightning gods of the Anarchs."

Brenn had mentioned an underground of Anarchs who still carried on some esoteric cultish worship of their individualistic philosophy as opposed to the strict socialism of the Federation.

"The Anarchs brought their bolts from the skies and the great cities melted in the supernal sun fires."

Evidently the utilization of basic atomic energies to destroy the Federation which Brenn had mentioned as a possibility had became catastrophic reality. The will-to-power fanaticism—they hadn't been able to condition that out of certain stubborn inherent characteristics. The Anarchs, then, had struck unexpectedly, destroyed the rigidly disciplined collectivism they had despised for so long.

With a soft ironic laugh, Deker recalled the code of the Utopes who had established the Hundred Cities Federation from the stuff dreams were then made of. Something from the works of Bellamy:

> With a tear for the dark past, turn we then to the dazzling future, and veiling our eyes, press forward.

THE fanatical chanting came back to him, the quivering filthy faces, the sea of leaping, whirling celebrants. This—this was the dazzling future. An Utopian thought it had been, to attempt to escape from an imperfect society into one conceived to fulfill ideal human values. But the word, Utopia, was from an ancient race, the Greeks, and significantly enough meant: "Nowhere."

They had ignored the temper of individuals, variable human nature—which they had thought to control by conditioning—or the inevitable opposition of entrenched groups such as the Anarchs. And now that magnificent but deluded civilization had been reduced to a pack of shivering, superstition-haunted primates, whining and grubbing about in the ruins of a former glory they had forgotten except as glittering myth and frightful legend.

The scientific hierarchy which had guarded the encystment-vault had altered only slightly to become a hierarchy of priesthood. And the unwanted freaks of the Hundred Cities had become gods!

Deker stiffened. His eyes probed outward beyond the firelight where a distorted cry had cut off the other shrieks of the celebrants. The two high priests sank down, murmuring incantations against evil. The ragged mob around the fires were frozen into taut outlines staring toward the valley to the north.

"What is it now?" the hunchback murmured into Deker's ear. "What awful world have we found, trying to escape that other one?"

Shar gripped his arm tightly. With a terrible abruptness then, from a thousand or so straining throats, the cry was torn:

"The Beasts!"

Deker was on his feet, eyes fighting the glimmering vagueness of fires and moonlight. The two-headed man moved his two puckered mouths in a desperate effort to speak. Finally he formed halting words:

"Deker! My pain was padded with dreams before. Now there can be no more dreaming.

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Deker, I must die! Kill me!"

The priests were marching away. Deker heard them exhorting the shivering mob with hysterical boldness.

"Fight, children of Utopia. The Temple Gods of Brenn stand over us. Slay the Beasts. Revenge! Kill!"

After a pulsing silence, Deker thought he could feel the waves of growing courage beating round him. With it, in himself, grew an ecstatic surging longing. Then his straining eyes saw the vague loping forms dodging through the leaning ruins. They seemed to be half the height of the Utopes, but long, slender, and fast. These were only soft, delicate padding sounds as they moved in closer to the kill.

Deker turned toward the lesser gods on the platform with him. He saw their white, desperate faces, knew they were groping, trying to comprehend the vastness of the circumstances into which time and the vagaries of an old man had thrown them. Some of them had made adjustments to their own abnormalities back in their own time, had accepted Nirvana, to escape a world that despised them. And instead of a rewarding sleep, dreams, Lethe, they got this! There was no equipment here to send them once more out of reality. Unless they returned to the vault to the encystment capsules. Deker wondered.

He clenched his fists. He cursed Brenn. Yet, without Brenn, he might have remained just another cog in an uninteresting static machine until he was destroyed. Now, at least, he lived.

"These are our people, still," he said tensely, quickly. "Maybe no one survives in the other cities, but these Utopes still live because we gave them hope, and faith. We were misfits in the Federation, but we're gods now. Do whatever you choose. I'm going to fight."

He jumped from the platform. And even as he hit the ground he felt the hunchback beside him.

"Fool, Deker!" he heard Shar hiss. "Come back! Let's not die among those dogs!" But Deker didn't even look at Shar.

The hunchback swung along beside him, his wide, heavy mouth stretched in a gleaming grin. His deep-set eyes above bony cheeks shone with bright anticipation.

"*Götterdämmerung,*" he chuckled. "A short, sweet life for the gods."

The priests were screaming commands. The tattered horde had formed into a rough defense line. Behind it huddled a group of cowering women and naked children with bloated stomachs. Around them stood old men with clubs. The others, preparing to fight, held crude swords beaten from heat-softened metal.

ASIDE from the hunchback, four others of the "gods" had followed Deker—the albino, the two-headed man, the little bald-headed freak with the pallid skin, and the other oddity with a delicate airy stride who seemed almost to have been a bird. There were bulges on each shoulder that could have been wings. Together they edged their way through the trembling, tightly-packed Utopes.

As Deker broke through the front line, he stopped. The hunchback drew in his breath hoarsely, then began humming a strange wordless dirge. The albino squealed and hid behind the hunchback.

No firelight here. A jagged mass of steely splinters jutted upward behind the Beasts. They stood silently, only partially visible in the purple black shadows and the splashing pools of moonlight, about fifty feet from Deker. Then their long sleek lengths began rising upward, growing before Deker's startled gaze. They became taller than Deker, and their forepaws were making motions to each other! Then he heard them talking—talking!

"The sport is over. They must all be killed now."

"Yes. They who have been awakened might make the others able to fight us."

"Those who have awakened are different. Get them first. Kill!"

Deker shot a desperate glance to either side. For one incredulous instant he realized the significance of what he was seeing, hearing. These creatures still appeared more feline than human, but they walked upright. They had a crude human speech. And their forepaws had become—hands! Hands with long, flexing talons.

Deker flung himself to one side. He heard a rising moan of fear—fear and something else. Tortured mental conflict. The Utopes turned. They were routed without even a gesture of resistance. Their clubs and crude words clanged in piles as they threw them away and scrambled back, pawing, mouths twisting with fear. While Deker fought, dazedly as though in a nightmare, he saw the expanse behind him suddenly barren of all Utopes.

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Only their gods remained to battle the Beasts!

Deker rolled along the partly frozen ground. His hand closed over the rough handle of an abandoned sword. He leaped at a grinning, whiskered face. He saw the hunchback beside him, a club in one hand, a dripping sword in the other. The albino, of whom Deker caught darting glimpses, was squeaking furiously, leaping about with nervous frantic speed, his blade flashing in and out like a needling fang.

A swishing talon spun Deker's weapon from his hand. His left arm was suddenly numb. As agony stunned his brain, he fell to his knees. Above him was the Beast's grinning face, with brilliant probing green eyes. He saw the talon sweeping down, retracting, coyly playing. It struck again.

"Götterdämmerung!" repeated the hunchback, with a panting laugh.

CHAPTER IV

Ruins of Death

WHEN the blow failed to fall, Deker shifted his eyes upward and saw why. The two-headed man was wrapped in the Beast's arms. Blood streamed from the Beast's throat from a wound the two-headed man's sword had put there. Deker heard the crunching sounds as the Beast smashed the two heads one after the other. The Beast then fell sprawling over the body of the two-headed man, its tail twitching even after it was dead.

Deker managed to gain his feet. Five Beasts still remained to battle the gods. The others—how many Deker didn't know—had sped off in pursuit of the fleeing Utopes. The hunchback and the albino stood on either side of Deker, swords ready. Two Beasts lay motionless on the ground.

"Let's fall back deeper into the ruins," suggested Deker weakly.

The albino squealed. "Yes! They want *me* more than anyone."

Then Deker remembered. "Where's Shar?"

He eyed the silent Beasts whose green and yellow eyes stared fixedly. As if in answer, Deker heard a long, roaring laugh. He turned. The Cyclops ran past with Shar thrown over his shoulder. She was yelling, beating with impotent fists on the Cyclop's broad back. They disappeared beneath the high mound of twisted metal.

A Beast started to spring after them.

"Back, Jharl!" another warned. "The death waits there. Back!"

Deker swayed toward the dark mass hiding the Cyclops and Shar.

"Easy," cautioned the hunchback. "We'll retreat after them, but take your time. These Beasts aren't so tough. They hate cold steel."

"All right," agreed Deker.

They backed slowly toward the decline leading under the pile of metal. But the Beasts seemed reluctant to follow. Nowhere could Deker see a sign that any Utopes had remained behind near their crude shelters to fight beside their gods. But from varied distances he did hear the cries of the fleeing and the dying.

"We at least gave them courage," said Deker drily. "For a few thousand years. Gave them hope anyway. We were effective gods all right—as long as we slept."

One of the Beasts started to cut off their retreat. But again one of the four ordered him back. Deker knew the Beasts were playing with them.

The Beasts were comparatively tireless; they could wait. Soon many more of their kind would return from the slaughter. And unless some unforeseeable development occured fast, the remaining gods would soon join the others. The two-headed man's pain was ended forever. The man who might have had wings no longer dreamed of what he might have been. The little pallid bald-headed man was dead. Gone from their brief, unsought Olympus.

But what really mattered was what had happened to Shar! Mentally the Cyclops had conditioned himself by brooding introspection and reading to assume the attitudes his physical appearance suggested. A monstrous, three-eyed colossus out of legend.

The nearest Beast gestured frantically. He called—a high mewling cry.

"Back, Jharl!"

Deker glanced behind him. They were at the head of the long slope ending in the heart of the pile concealing Shar and the Cyclops. It was then Deker noticed the slight emanating glow. A sentient cold. Radio-activity!

"Wait," Deker said harshly. "Hold it, Red!"

The albino stopped. The Beasts had already stopped some distance away, though

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one of them kept impatiently easing toward Deker, then jumping back, trembling with frustration.

Deker knew enough about physics from his compensatory studying those long evenings after working with his despised lathe, to know why they might die. "The Burning Death." The priests had said it came out of the atom-blasted ruins. For perhaps thousands of years these metals filled with neutrons had radiated their poisons, might continue to do so for many more.

The unstable nuclei of the metal which had captured the wandering neutrons were still disintegrating slowly. If a living organism got too much, the blood corpuscles would disintegrate too. The area was a deadly pool of rays and radio-active particles. Only this heart of the field still remained deadly after so long a time.

Deker explained while the Beasts stood off, silently waiting.

"We evidently have only two choices," he finished. "Stay here where the Beasts are afraid to follow, and die—unpleasantly—in some unpredictable future. Or go back out now and fight the Beasts."

Deker knew what he had to do—go into the very heart of the radiation after Shar. He wondered why he hadn't done it before. Then the moon went down behind a black cloudbank. After that the only light was the soft bluish glow from the fissioning ruins.

THE albino's eyes were small red glares in the dark. The hunchback's big hands closed on Deker's arm. He heard a deep laugh. Then the strange song coming out of the dark chilled Deker, yet soothed him.

Cold steel in the heart and final sleep;
Cold steel and the claws of the Beast.

"No!" whined the albino. "Not me. I'll take the gamma rays—anything but the Beasts! Stay here with me!"

Ten slitted yellow-green eyes glowed back at Deker as he stood there waiting. Then from behind them Deker heard Shar scream. He heard the bellowing roar of the Cyclops. Shar screamed again. After that came a terrible silence that went on, a timeless pulsing fear. Deker pawed the darkness. He must go after Shar. But what could he do against the Cyclops, with his swelling helpless arm?

"How long can we stay within the radiation field without being fatally affected?" asked the hunchback.

"I don't know," said Deker. "We can stand some without damage. We're just within the field evidently. Shar and the Cyclops are in its heart. However, there's no way of knowing how long after exposure the symptoms will appear, then death."

"We should take the chance until dawn," the hunchback reasoned. "We wouldn't have a chance against the Beasts in the dark. They can see. We can't—except the albino. And it's quite plain that he doesn't want to fight them anyway."

"Let's wait until dawn," begged the albino. "wait with me."

"All right, Red," Deker agreed. "I want some kind of chance. At least I want to see. We need some rest, too."

Deker felt of his arm. It was swelling rapidly, pain growing with the increased size. He gripped his crude sword.

"Deker!" the albino was asking desperately. "What does it mean? These Beasts becoming almost human?"

"Natural evolutionary processes wouldn't account for it," said Deker. "Unless we've been in suspended animation for millions of years instead of merely thousands. And I don't believe we have."

"Abnormal evolutionary development rate," said the hunchback with unexpected profundity.

"Probably," agreed Deker. "The radioactivity from the hundred blasted cities has created a freak world into which we fit no better than in the world we left. No telling what hard radiation has done to the normal processes we once knew. But why haven't the Utopes changed, too? Accelerated evolutionary growth, if it's caused by the radiation, should apply to all living organisms."

"Why bother with logic here?" sighed the hunchback. "Accept what we find, as we find it. Logic is false; it can never be complete. The Utopian Federation was based on mechanistic logic. It's gone."

During a pause, Deker could hear the distant cries of Beasts and sometimes a cry that might have been human. The hunchback broke the depressing silence with an appropriate chant:

Gone, gone the crystalline heights
Of Tyre and Sodom and Gomorrah.
Alexandria and Ninevah and New York, too,
are gone.
And the Hundred Cities' dust has mingled
without song.
Ah, Deker, no man is infallible.
No city—no city is immortal.

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"You sing well," commented Deker wearily, his eyes drooping with fever and fatigue. "When could you have learned to be a singer of verse in the unemotional Federation?"

"You studied at nights, Deker, to take your mind from your inherent feelings of inferiority, of not belonging. Well, I sang. In the museum libraries, illegally of course, I read of the darkest histories of man; for I knew that only in the past would I have ever fitted in. I never thought I would find my world in a distant future. Yet I should have known that dark always must follow the light. And the light the dark."

Deker started away into the heart of the radio-active field after Shar. But the hunchback seemed to sense his movements in the dark. Powerful arms wrapped around him, held him back.

Deker explained, and the hunchback softly called him a fool.

"She isn't worthy of you, Deker. She is too abnormal, even for you. Her mind is more bestial than those who wait for us. She could have escaped the Cyclops, followed us into battle. She loves the Cyclops, his brute strength, mastery and savagery. She isn't for you, Deker."

"It's a thing I've got to do," whispered Deker. He tried to fight free.

"No, Deker. You aren't going. Listen!"

DECKER heard it. It was close at first, then began fading as the two ran away together on the far side of the radio-active debris. Shar's laughter. Not demented laughter, but sly, triumphant.

As Deker slumped down, his heart was heavy with the pain of defeat. He stretched out unfeeling on the hard, partly frozen ground. Finally he felt nothing at all except an infinite thickening softness. He would sleep. . . .

Some time later he felt hands shaking him. He opened burning eyes. The hunchback's gargoyle face was grinning close above his, eyes gleaming with cynical humor.

"There's no escape for us through sleep, Deker," the hunchback said. "We tried it for a long time. We've always got to wake up to realities. It's time now, Deker. It's dawn."

Deker rolled over, watching the serrated outline of the crumbled city against a crimson sunrise. Then, coming on over on an elbow, he saw the Beasts. Five of them still standing there fully erect on their strangely bent haunches, fixed with terrible patience. The dew of the night had settled like minute jewels over their sleek glistening fur.

"All right," said Deker, climbing painfully to his feet. His body was stiff with cold, and chills of fever jerked uncontrollably over the length of his throbbing body. His arm was a swollen useless lump.

"It's time, so let's go."

He gripped the sword in his good hand.

The albino screamed, but Deker didn't hear him. He didn't hear anything as he walked forward, except the mad pounding of his own heart. But his fevered brain was groping frantically for some last strategic effort. A seething anger clutched him as he ran toward the Beasts. He didn't want to die yet.

He heard himself yelling. Roaring, the hunchback was beside him. And the Beasts moved, blurs of feral lightning energy.

Deker realized then how weak and useless he was as he stumbled, went down. Again and again he swung the blade, shearing only cold morning mist. Hooked talons raked down, then just short of decapitating him,

[*Turn page*]

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Help 15 Miles of Kidney Tubes Flush Out Poisonous Waste

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When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

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(Adv.)

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the claws flexed inward, and a sadistic slap sent him sprawling. A Beast was straddling him, its tongue licking through gleaming fangs.

A paw gave him a playful cuff, and he rolled across the thawing ground. Dazed, Deker saw that the hunchback had been more successful. His sword dripped red. A Beast was twitching on the ground. The hunchback laughed as he ran to Deker, stood over him.

The Beast that had been toying with Deker fell back, its emotionless round face staring. It was still breathing normally in spite of the short, intense skirmish.

"You can fight," it said. "Last night you fought, but we thought it only an exceptional instance. You can still fight! Why is this? None of the Utopes or the Glowing Ones fight."

Deker could detect fear. Not of any immediate danger from himself or the hunchback or the albino, but of this mysterious ability to fight.

Deker frowned through a mist of fevered weariness. It wasn't at all normal. Whatever else the human species had lacked they had always been children of conflict. They thrived on barriers to achievement. But the humans of this era had never been known to fight the Beasts.

Why?

The Utopes here were groveling in cowardice, helplessly fleeing in constant terror of the Beasts. They had made swords, but they couldn't use them. They had made them in anticipation of the gods awakening and giving them courage.

But the gods had failed.

"What has happened that you humans can fight?" the Beast asked again.

So Deker bluffed. "Not us alone. All the Utopes have changed. Soon we'll all be hunting you again. For sport. You've been good hunting for a long time."

With snarling screams, the Beasts leaped in again. Deker reasoned this to be his last combat. But he didn't care. Deep beneath his fear, was a gladness for all that had happened.

How much better a way was this than even Nirvana.

He managed to get to his feet, swaying. Then the woman in the sphere appeared. Waiting behind a column of twisted metal, she had been watching the strange combat, watching and listening.

CHAPTER V

Perl of the Sphere

FROM behind the blackened heap, the woman came near before Deker realized that she was there. First he saw only the shimmering sphere moving noiselessly over the ground, then he saw the woman through the translucent shell.

She didn't seem human, glowing with an argent brilliance through shifting hues. Her hair was red-gold. Her tall body was soft rich bronze covered slightly with glittering stuff. She was walking with austere measured strides over the debris, and the coruscating globe encircling her followed her movements faithfullly like an enwrapping splendid shadow.

Rather boredly she moved straight toward the Beasts. They sprang back with long leaps of thirty feet. They landed crouched, tongues licking and eyes flaming. The one that had spoken with Deker trembled down the tawny sleekness of its body.

"A Glowing One!" it growled to its followers, then lapsed into a slurred spitting gibberish.

Then they ran. Long, frightened bounds took them away with startling speed, down the long slope of ruin, sent them diving headlong into the thick sea fog of the valley.

The girl moved past the panting hunchback, toward Deker. The albino crept up beside the hunchback, crying, his little pink hands rubbing at his eyes.

Deker made some exclamation of awe, while the girl came as near to him as was possible without the translucent sphere touching him. It had about a ten-foot radius. It seemed to be a sphere within a sphere, the outside one rotating around the other. The sphere represented great danger—and power.

Deker backed away. The sphere followed, and the hunchback laughed. But the girl didn't seem to notice, as she studied Deker. He felt small again, inferior, embarrassed. He hated her a little then, with the resentment he had felt for the exalted environment of the Federation.

The albino edged closer, leaving the hunchback. Deker waited, for what, he didn't know. He only knew this woman was in a position to make the first, maybe even the final, gesture.

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He blinked with pain, holding his shoulder. His arm seemed ready to burst. The woman didn't seem interested in his arm.

"There were really men sleeping in the vault then," she finally said.

The protection surrounding her had no nullifying effect on her voice which was rich and low and coldly impersonal.

Deker nodded. Her arrogant cyanogen-blue eyes narrowed.

"You have slept in that vault a very long time, if the myth of the Utopes is fact. Our history also speaks of you sleepers, but I hardly believed it. You came from before the Change? That is almost too incredible. I wouldn't believe it, except that you can fight. It is odd to see a human with that ability—disgusting and terrible too. Tell me, what was the date in which you were put into this—sleep?"

Deker said in a faint whisper, "Twenty-one-sixty."

Awe broke the cold mask of detachment for an instant. But her interest was only that of an indurated scientist who had coldly drawn something new out of a test-tube.

She started to speak, then jerked her head with a startled gesture toward the sky. Deker followed her gaze. A cloud of flying things in perfect formation was descending, growing larger with fearful speed. A distant buzzing grew into a sullen roar.

"Flies!" the hunchback yelled wildly. "Flies, twice as big as a man!"

"I would advise you two to seek shelter," the girl in the sphere said calmly. "They cannot touch me inside this composite protective field."

The formation of bee-flies was hurtling straight for Deker. His eyes frantically sought shelter, though the beauty of the attacking giants penetrated his fear.

The black velvet bodies into which the sunlight sank and disappeared; the fringe of golden hairs along their bodies, the steel-gray many-faceted eyes of which their heads were made. He saw the incredibly delicate formation of their wings which seemed to have a spread of almost thirty feet, so thin the light in passing through them was refracted into rainbow tints so that the whole sky was a blaze of color.

"You probably find it rather amazing what has happened even to flies in forty thousand years," the woman said carelessly.

But Deker was running in slow painful haste, with the hunchback and the albino. The sky was a riotous blaze of fantastic coloration as the bee-flies circled overhead, huge lancets below enormous compound eyes expanding and dripping with hunger as they reached down, preparing to draw the blood from their prey.

Deker saw the hunchback now, crawling under the debris. But a sound had stopped Deker. Not an ordinary scream, even of terror. But a soul-wrenching cry that sent little pockets of fear bursting inside Deker's stomach, chilling his back.

DEKER turned. The albino fell. Evidently he had badly injured his foot or ankle for he repeatedly fell. And just above him a bee-fly hovered, its wings quivering, its lancet projecting down long and bristling, a filamented mouth gaping at its tip.

Deker wondered why he did it. He didn't care for the albino, a queer little helpless wretch in a perpetual funk. But in spite of the giant bee-flies, Deker started back to help the albino. He managed to retrieve his sword. He retched as the long lancet smacked, stuck against the Albino's twitching back.

The translucent wings beat in shimmering waves as the blood-sucking instruments fixed inexorably on the albino. Deker threw some last bit of burning energy into his wavering brain and tottering legs—but the bee-fly was taking his meal with him, up into the air. Deker saw the albino's red eyes bulging with final horror. The white face opened, and a last tattered cry ripped out.

Leaping upward, Deker futilely swung his sword. Around him there seemed suddenly a thousand sucking lancets. Then one moment of bursting pain. His mind seemed to explode. There was a ripping agony as though every atom in him were flying apart.

Then the gently swaying music. The caress of soft depthless clouds. And no more pain. Somehow he felt that the pain could never return. It was the last impression he remembered before the dark cloud released him from all the others. . . .

Deker opened his eyes. He was inside the sphere! He was lying at the girl's small sandaled feet, and she was looking down at him with detached interest.

"You live," she stated. "Remarkable. I didn't think you would. Though I had to take the chance, for the bee-flies would certainly have killed you. You must be radically different physically from the ordinary human, or you would never have passed through the

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shield, even though I did lower its rate as much as possible."

He turned on his side. The world out there was a shimmering unreality as though viewed through watered glass. High up, the bee-flies were winging away across the fog-bound valley. The hunchback was out there staring, sword poised.

He reached out with the blade.

"No!" Deker heard the girl exclaim. "Don't touch the shield. You would die!"

."I'm just as inhuman as he is." The hunchback grinned. "But you're the boss right now, lady. You, Deker—you all right?"

Deker tried to speak, failed.

"He is very ill," the girl said. Her voice held no compassion. "I'm taking him with me to my sanctum."

"And where is your—sanctum?"

"Not so far from here. I will go slowly so that if you are his—friend, is that the word? —then you may follow us."

"Why are you taking Deker with you?"

"Is that his name? Odd—Deker. Anyway I'm taking him because of a certain curiosity. I've often wondered about the ancient Utopes who were said to be sleeping in the vault. I will cure him of his wound by ray treatment. I would learn more of his ability to fight. In our world, only Beasts can do that."

There it was again, mused Deker, half asleep. The outsiders, the freaks.

Again reality faded for him, and he dreamed. How easy it was anymore for him to return to sleep as an escape from reality. Well, his body had certainly been conditioned to it long enough. But it was a weakness now. He slept too easily.

Peculiar woman, his fading thoughts decided. Unpleasantly arrogant and emotionless and egotistical, but so pleasantly beautiful and desirable. And she was controlling nuclear forces in a world shattered to barbarism by the atom, reduced to another dark age of half human horrors, accelerated evolution, monsters, in which the only other humans he had seen were little more than crawling apes.

But he slept. . . .

He felt much better after he awoke, ate, drank some bitter-sweet juice, and found that his arm had almost healed. He had slept for five days.

Her sanctum was a high naked tower of metal four miles from the remains of City Three. It was built on the side of a heavily forested slope at the foot of mist-softened mountains, beside a clear cold stream. And her sanctum had never been intended for anyone else but her. It's interior was a simple, utilitarianly designed cylindrical shell. Its walls were the same as the sphere in which she traveled, a composite force shield against any interference in her individual pathway of existence.

GANS, the hunchback, sat outside in the warm noonday sun, singing beside the mountain water. Deker, sprawled out on pneumatic cushions beneath the window from which he could see distant peaks and past which an occasional winged monster broodingly flapped. He listened to the hunchback's resigned, introspective, and rather sad song:

> Never shall I strain my dull eyes more
> For hidden meaning; I shall be as one
> Who in his dim perception of the skies
> Sees but the certain glory of the sun
> And does not care to question or devise
> An answer to his own oblivion.

The girl stood looking out the window. Her body, now free of the protective shield, was bronzed, and almost too beautiful in the sunlight which was strangely bright in her red-gold hair. Her name was Perl. She had no other name. She was an Anarch.

Deker wondered how these philosophies could endure through eons of wars and even beyond the final war of all. A simple little philosophy that could be traced back, according to Perl, to a time-lost philosopher called Zeno the Stoic, the first Anarch.

Perl turned, eyes shining with fanatical self-conviction, withdrawn into her lonely self-sufficiency. She repeated the code of the Anarchs:

> Every man is his own government, his own law, his own church, a system within himself.

"It has never died, our philosophy," she said. "It has reechoed through the ages. And there was never a greater need for it than during the reign of the Utopes who had submerged the individual completely to the mechanistic dictates of government."

"Your Anarch ancestors launched the lightning gods that finished civilization?" asked Deker.

She shook her head. "The Utopes. They cannot admit that their own faulty system destroyed itself, so they blame the Anarchs. But the Federation was undermined by its

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own weak base, by erratic though very human madness that is inevitable in a social order."

Yes. No one had suspected Brenn of being anything other than a scientist devoted to the Federation. So there had been others.

"The Fascios built an underground scientific hierarchy," Perl explained. "They devised weapons of terrible destructiveness. They had no reason—they were human, victims of socialization. They wanted power. They launched their attack and, a few hours later, all the Hundred Cities were destroyed."

Beneath her cold exterior she was quivering with a growing fear, a terrible fear that Deker could feel only as vague tendrils clawing on his consciousness. From behind her eyes deep stark shadows shone. And Deker knew a racial memory persisted in this girl's mind of madness beyond comprehension.

"Maybe only a few Utopes remain in the world now," she said. "And they have been dying rapidly. They have learned too much to fight for survival. So they must die, and that is best."

CHAPTER VI

"Humanity Is Doomed!"

INTEREST grew in Deker as he listened to Perl talk. He asked her about the Anarchs who had survived the destruction, retaining a high scientific culture.

"Ours isn't a society," she said with sudden vehemence. "Society is evil. We have reached the final logical stage of man. This is ultimate individualism. The highest and only sane law is that of individual expression. Compulsion, for whatever purpose, serves only to corrupt otherwise normal individual activities."

"But man is naturally social," said Deker. "He's always been. He managed to survive because he cooperated. The trouble with the Utopian Federation is simply that it became too standardized."

Perl solemnly shook her head. "Perhaps that was true, in the beginning. But being cooperative was only a step upward in the evolutionary scale. We have evolved beyond that stage. We have found individual perfectionism, absolute anarchism. Any social group demands leaders; that means power in individuals over the others which in its very nature is a pernicious influence. Those who rule are bound, even against their best intentions, to become self-seeking, unmindful of those whom they represent." There was an exalted pause, then she added, "We have reached perfection. The individual is his own god!"

Deker thought of the ironic twist. He had escaped one system of final and static socialism into one of equally static and suicidal individualism.

"How many of you Anarchs survived the Atom War?" he asked.

"Not many. We were far underground where we built our laboratories. We knew that the rest of the socialistic Hundred Cities would be annihilated. And when the—the awful destruction came, we survived. Everything about our individual order has remained exactly the same. We have the dominant intelligence."

"To dominate over what?" asked Deker.

"Ourselves, whom we have learned to control and guide completely. Free from any social restriction, any communal government or organization, man is in his perfect state." Her expression changed. Her line of thought had altered. "You actually lived before the Change?" she said. "What were you in that other terrible time?"

Deker smiled wryly. "I was a freak there, as I am here. I hated that world as much as your Anarch ancestors did—maybe more. Standardization killed individual freedom. But this Anarch system of yours, by following an entirely divergent path, has reached the same gray end of stagnation and futility."

She didn't comment. He went on, told her all about the encystment vault.

"But how have you preserved, intact, the culture with which you started?" he asked then. "How has your race survived if the individual is so—er—inviolate?"

"I've said there is—procreation. A form of marriage." She revealed emotion for the first time, a brief blush. She turned away, again looking out the window as she talked. "Each composite protective shield, both of the sanctums and the spheres, is attuned to the individual vibratory pattern. Sometime during our lives we may find another Anarch whose vibratory pattern is similar. If that should happen we consider such vibratory rapport all that is necessary for mating. If such a meeting occurs we must mate. It is our only law, and that is strictly for sur-

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vival of the species. We terminate the association as quickly as possible."

Deker smiled openly. "You're not even fooling yourself, Perl. You say no one except one suitable for mating with you can penetrate your composite shield. I did. You say it's because I'm physically not human. Why not admit that my vibratory pattern is almost identical with yours? That is why I was able to penetrate your commuting shield and the walls of your sanctum."

Perl's reaction was violent. Her face flushed a deep red, then paled.

"You!" she said, with dripping acidity.

It hurt, the way she said it.

"Physically, that's the only explanation," he said. "We're for each other, Perl, according to your own implacable laws, whether you like it or not."

"It's ridiculous. As soon as your arm is completely healed you can leave. In fact, your arm is well enough now. Good-by! Go back and marry one of your bestial Utopes!"

"If there are any left," said Deker harshly. "The Beasts were pursuing them. It seems as though the Beasts have let the Utopes live for sporting purposes. Now, since we awoke, they're out to kill every remaining Utope for fear they'll develop the ability to fight. And there's nothing we can do." Deker was on his feet now, standing close to her, looking straight into her eyes. "Unless you help us, Perl!"

SHE trembled with repugnance and horror.

"You are primitive and brutal indeed. You actually would destroy?"

"For survival, Perl! You have the knowledge, the power the Beasts don't have—yet. Use it now before the Beasts overtake and surpass you scientifically. You've got to help or humanity's finished. You think you can survive in your individual egoistic shell, but you're dying the same as the Utopes. Man can't live isolated. I found that out one time. You can't survive. You need the associative processes of society to develop. You said yourself that nothing about your culture has changed in thousands of years.

"Listen, Perl! Help me fight the Beasts! Help me organize the Utopes, make them sane again so they can fight to survive. We can begin a new civilization over the old ruins, start the long trail back up. The human race is almost gone. Unless we organize a social group, start soon on the road back—unless we do, we'll die here. The Beasts will rule!"

Perl fell back. A huge black form passed across the window. Deker caught a quick glance of a gigantic beak. It was a bird much larger than the body of a man.

"It was the Atom War," she said softly. Her lips quivered, her eyes smoldered with that rising fear tide. "It's a racial memory which no human can lose from his mind. Man's socialized aggressiveness led to that war, his inherent desire to evolve. He's lost that now, because he had to. To preserve sanity he adopted an attitude of nonchange, the only logical attitude. The horrors of the war into which his desire to progress led him changed his entire psychology. Those of us who are Anarchs, and even the Utopes, can worship only immediacy. There is a fear blockage against all change."

"But the Utopes still have the spark," said Deker. "They want to fight, progress. They summoned us as gods to help them."

"But they're social minded," she said. "That isn't the right road. This is the only logical state, this individual perfectionism. Progressive evolution, as you call it, led only to mass self-annihilation, and things even worse." Her voice broke, shivered like shattered glass. "Billions slaughtered—blood—rivers and oceans of it!"

Her voice sank to a low moan. Her hands shook as Deker looked at them. She swayed. He was quickly at her side. For an instant she accepted him there, and he felt her warm young softness. Then she indignantly pushed him away. Frantically, desperately, Deker argued:

"Your introspective life can't last. Change is a natural law. Without it, an organism atrophies and dies. If you can't see that, then you're truly lost. Your generation might survive; maybe even the next, or the next. But humanity is doomed, unless you use the power you have and fight. Fight, Perl! Fight like a beast in the jungle!"

He turned from her, a gasping girl, wild-eyed with shock. He looked out. The hunchback still lolled lazily by the stream, singing, eyes closed. His brown fur robe was thrown back, and his twisted massive body drank in the sun like a thirsty plain.

Sensing Deker above him, he opened his eyes. They crinkled in a laugh.

"It's time we were leaving, Deker. There's nothing here for us. We're alone here, even more than the other time."

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Deker wordlessly turned from Gans the Hunchback.

"You haven't decided yet to use your knowledge of power, and work with us and with the Utopes against the Beasts," he said to Perl. A pause, and he added, "Then you will never decide. It's your burden, your conscience—the death of the human species. It's terribly wrong, because it's possible that man deserves another chance."

Deker thought that she wanted to cry, but couldn't.

"The rapidly evolving Beasts are overtaking you rapidly," he went on. "And even in your own isolated Anarch shells, they will eventually find and destroy you!"

A faint cry shivered from her. She staggered, sank down on a couch.

"Get out!" she cried in tortured shuddering anguish. "Get out!"

Never having had the opportunity to understand women, Deker walked to the wall.

"Very well. But somewhere in this twisted, defeated world we'll find humans who are really human, who will fight with us against the Beasts."

From far away he heard her trembling voice.

"There are no such people any more. I know. Even the Utopes have developed too far for that."

HER hand moved with trembling slowness. A section of the wall dissolved. Deker walked out into the sunshine. The hunchback rose lazily and they walked down toward the wide plain leading from the foothills toward a river flanked by willows.

Deker saw her shining red-gold hair framed by the window of her ivory tower. He waved, tried to bury the ache in his heart. She didn't wave back, but stood immobile in the window's frame. The hunchback laughed briefly, then bitterly sang:

She is lonely enough, dissatisfied and cold:
There is no crowd to take her to its mocking din,
Infold her in its grasp; tighten its faulty hold.
There she kneels, secluded and apart,
To worship, in the chapel of her heart.

Deker stared with new awe at the hunchback as they walked on through the pungent-smelling thickness of the lengthening grass. A wandering minstrel of time.

"Life has little meaning for you now, Gans?" he asked.

"Maybe it has none," said the hunchback. "We'll see what happens, where this adventure leads us. Until then:

The sand, the sun, the sea,
The moon a gentle gleam.
A memory. The fragment of a dream."

Turning, Deker could still see the shining of her red-gold hair through the window's frame.

"She is like Semele," said the hunchback.

"Who was Semele?"

"She was the daughter of Cadmus and mother of Dionysius. Zeus having promised her whatsoever she should ask, she begged to behold him in his splendor, and was destroyed by his lightnings."

CHAPTER VII

Defeat

NOW IT WAS sunset, and the valley was again fog-bound. As Deker and the hunchback approached the ruined city, he could hear the roars of the animals grazing madly on the plains, animals Deker had grown too familiar with during the months he and Gans had wandered over an insane, distorted continent.

They had managed to survive mainly and precariously by constant flight and desperate concealment. They had seen other Anarchs, each with his or her ivory tower and force shields. But wherever they had gone and whomever or whatever they had seen, the story was the same: No human being was free from the psychic fear blockage against any kind of evolutionary change.

In contrast to this disease of unchange, they had seen the ferocious, terribly accelerated trail of the Beasts streaking with frightening speed ahead along their roadway of evolution. And none of the humans cared. They had rationalized their position. They cared nothing about the continued survival of their species.

Their own immediate generation, particularly their own individual egos, was all that mattered. For their sanity, they would pay the rather exorbitant price of racial extinction.

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The two gaunt, leanly muscled wanderers trudged over a low hill and down toward the massive plain of wrenched and molten steel. Small cooking fires sent up straight streamers of smoke through breathless air. A few dark figures scurried like nervous animals among the ruins.

"A few Utopes still live," commented the hunchback. "They can never leave the city of their fathers, the place where their gods once gave them hope."

As they walked in among the cooking fires, the tattered scrawny things that had been human, stared, cried out in confused fear, and streaked into their holes.

But Deker headed straight for the encystment vault. And as much as he had hated that world of the past, some part of it was far better than this futile aberrated world poisoned by radiation and by human defeat.

As Deker and the hunchback approached the jagged opening leading into the tunneled entrance to the vault, a towering figure stepped out, regally clothed in white furred robes and glittering metal bracelets.

"The Cyclops," muttered the hunchback. "He still lives. But he's sick, very sick."

His middle eye was blacker now, deeply hollowed and fiery. Shar appeared from behind the Cyclops. She clung to him for support.

The shine was gone from her black hair which clung down in a scalp mop. A yellow beast-skin hung loosely over a skeletal form that was barely skin and bone. Red stones whirled, glistening futilely from her ears. Deep down inside a dirty white face, her feverish black eyes blazed out at Deker. Talons gripped the Cyclops' wasting arm.

"The radiation;" said Deker. "I thought you had gone too far into it."

"We didn't know," rasped the Cyclops painfully. "We've found out. It hit us only recently."

"You're still faithful to the Utopes," said Deker softly. "You're their god."

"That's right," said the Cyclops. "And I'm remaining so."

"While you live, you're a god," said the hunchback as he sat down lazily on a porous, time-eaten chunk of metal.

While the Hunchback sat there with his eyes partly closed, Deker told the Cyclops and his mate everything he had discovered about the world of the Anarchs, the accelerated evolutionary development of the Beasts who were overtaking and would surpass man. The sickening death's head skull of the Cyclops nodded.

"I know. I've tried to drive them against the Beasts. But they run until they drop, or hide. I've organized defense methods. We have signals, and stand watches so we can hide before the Beasts can surprise us. I've had them store up food, too, so they can stay in hiding for long periods. That's all I could do." He coughed.

"You've been a good god," commented Deker.

The Cyclops shook off Shar's emaciated arm, tottered forward. There was a horrible impression of great strength despite his wasted body. His right hand came from behind him grasping a heavy double-hilted sword.

"And I'm going to remain their ruler." He repeated it with growing ferocity, his middle eye glaring.

"Why worry about it if you'll soon die?" asked the hunchback.

"I'll die a god!" said the Cyclops dramatically. "As I've lived."

"Wait!" began Deker, but already the skeletal figure of the Cyclops was shambling forward, swinging the polished blade.

Deker managed a crude parry and dodged away. Then the Cyclops fell, fell gasping, battering in slowing desperation with fleshless arms. Deker dragged him off, while the awful outline of Shar fell on him like a thing from a grave, clawing frantically. Deker flung her away. She began to die there. The Cyclops crawled to her, crying with a dark bestial loneliness.

DEKER was sick as he watched. They had clung precariously to life, but this sudden abnormal effort was ending it. They had got a tremendous dose of gamma rays and neutrons. Intestinal tracts had gradually broken down, and their bodies had been unable to manufacture enough white blood corpuscles.

It took Shar a long time to die, and before she was dead, the Cyclops joined her as though he wanted to. They both went into a coma and died together, an hour later.

"Well, they died as gods," said the hunchback, "and that's what they wanted. One by one they've all found what they wanted, except us, Deker."

They stood in the entrance to the vault, and this time the hunchback had no song to sing.

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Deker led the way without any further conversation into the tunnel. They stood in the dim luciferin glow of the cold light that could burn on for centuries more.

"Are you sure you don't mind staying here, Gans?"

"Are you sure you want to return to Nirvana, Deker?"

"I'm sure. My original purpose—and yours—in choosing Nirvana was to escape an intolerable world. I awoke too soon, or too late. It doesn't matter now. I want to go back to sleep."

"And I want to remain here," said the hunchback. "I seek no further for the chimera. One can search forever through the winding labyrinth and somewhere at the end of the quest, the minotaur always waits. I've had enough."

"You're bitter," said Deker. "You'll be lonely. And I'm afraid all your songs will be sad."

"My life will be short in such a world as this," declared the hunchback. "But I no longer care about escaping. There's no place to go. Who knows what conditions you will awaken to? Besides, one of us must remain behind. One must administer to the other until the encystment process is activated again."

"All right," said Deker with a conclusion arrived at several times before.

"Anyway," the hunchback added, "now that the Cyclops is gone, what few Utopes remain alive need a god. I don't think it quite fair that all their gods should abandon them."

They studied the records Brenn had left. All the necessary information was there. For Deker, who had studied and become so thoroughly educated in basic principles, it was fairly simple.

So again Deker was inside the capsule, suspended from the low ceiling of the vault like a pendulum so that even the Earth's movement would not disturb his sleep. All sensory stimuli were shut out, permitting the vasomotor centers complete freedom from disturbance in the hermetically sealed capsule. Again the temperature would lower to the 7.1 level and another stage of Nirvana would begin. And end—except that Nirvana should have no ending.

He closed his eyes. It was much easier for him now. For almost immediately, from long conditioning, his mind, his entire nervous system responded, and he began slipping away, deep deep down into that gloriously soft dream-sea. He heard the metronomes working again, far away—and fading, fading, the last soft chanting of the hunchback, Gans, as he sang above him, or somewhere through the falling curtain of mist:

I shall not go far, Deker.
I have my story and my laugh.
And always something happens, someone comes.
Long solitude will make the bargain fair;
The exchange even. I need but wait.

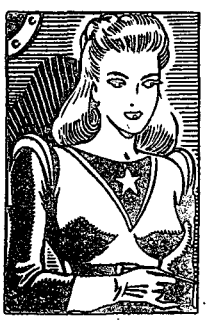
IT WAS easier this time for Deker to awake. The mechanism was so arranged that one comparatively simple threshold was left at normal waking level. When this one threshold level was activated by the metronome, it started a chain reaction, as the temperature gradually returned to normal, to an activation of all his bodily faculties.

This time there was little stiffness or pain. This—time?

Opening his eyes, he looked straight up through the transparent plastic cowling of

[*Turn page*]

"This Stairway Looks Like It's a Million Years Old!"



SO EXCLAIMED Carlotta the moment she saw the winding steps that soared steeply between banks of flowers as if—like Babel's tower—its makers intended it to pierce the sky. Its clean lines suggested dynamic purpose. Venomously green moss cushioned its steps. Twisted ropes of lianas portcullised it like curtains of woven black snakes.

It was only a forgotten flight of steps, yet from it pulsed a black aura of premonition. Hibbert and Burks would have turned from it. But Scarlatti, unaware of any threat, said: "Let's lamp where it lands."

What the four fugitives found when they ascended the stairs is one of the many surprises in THE BLUE FLAMINGO, by Hannes Bok, the amazing novel of magic and mystery featured in the January issue of our companion magazine STARTLING STORIES. Now on sale—15c at all stands!

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the encystment capsule. He waited a long time before he moved any other part of his body, thinking. He made one resolve then, that he knew he would keep. He would never go into the sleep again. No matter what happened, he knew he was finished with Nirvana.

Because for some reason, the thought of returning again and again to Nirvana was frightening. It was too abnormal, in a temporal sense, too vast in its possible implications. He might continue with this process forever, if that word held any meaning for him. Go on and on, beyond the race, beyond all life, find himself in some deserted sunset where there was nothing left—only dust and mute evidence of a final destruction, nothing save dust and a hot dry wind.

But as Deker looked out through the vault—everything else had changed!

Deker shivered as he pressed the button at his side. The cowling slid back. He was outside the capsule, looking across the small enclosure of the vault. Outside was incredible alteration. The protective mountain of sheeting, lead and plasticrete and steel had been removed. Parts of the steel walls of the vault had been replaced with translucent paneling.

Beyond, Deker could see towering walls and long gently winding halls that gave off a soothing pattern of shifting harmonic lights. Narrow columns rose from varied-colored pastel flooring, blossoming outward and up like monstrous flowers.

Men and women, a small group, were walking toward him down the hall. They were more or less grand, Deker decided, in brilliantly colored sandals and brief shorts—tall, willowy golden men and women with the carriage of kings and queens. They were gesticulating with a dignified excitement.

They came to the vision panels and stood looking in at him.

Deker's eyes fell down, saw his ragged fur skin hanging to his bony frame, saw the scarred flesh, the ragged, dirty nails curling on the ends of his hands. He glanced up again at his audience who were staring back with increasing curiosity, but with a high austere curiousness as though Deker were some sort of animal in an ostentatious zoo.

Animal—in a zoo!

A terrible familiar sickness hit him. There was a difference, but also an almost terrifying similarity with that other time, now how long ago? Perhaps he could never determine. Was there never, never to be an escape?

He shrugged off the growing sick fear. It was a selfish attitude to take in the face of the magnificent fact that man had survived!

Deker meant to find out how, and the finding would be worth all the terror and frustration. From those futile Anarchs in their egoistic shells, and from the groveling Utopes, these super-beings had developed.

A feeling of tremendous pride in his species pulsed through him as he stood there, an object of their polite disapprobation. His species were indefatigable, eternal. Their survival value was infinite, regardless of what sloughs of autodelusion and fantasy they allowed to entrap them.

A TRANSLUCENT panel slid back, and the two men stepped inside and approached him cautiously. How familiar their perfect masklike faces were, thought Deker, with that old returning bitterness. How lacking in individuality.

"We greet you, Sleeper," said one of them, uncomfortably it seemed, as though condescending toward some level he couldn't understand. "You—you may come with us."

Deker was fighting against that enroaching humility, that smothering sensation of inferiority, of not belonging.

"Is that an order, or a statement?" he said with exaggerated defiance.

The language the men spoke was strangely distorted, but Deker understood it in general. He had no difficulty there, and neither did they.

The man stammered an answer, looked slightly frightened.

"What—why, it's a request naturally. There is no coercion here."

"Of course not." Deker grinned sardonically. "Anyway, not so you would notice it. However, I would like to change into some other clothes, get something to—some nourishment. It will seem strange to feel human again."

Had he ever?

The tension sagged somewhat. Deker followed them through the staring crowd outside. He noticed how the women drew back from him with obvious distaste and antipathy they could not conceal. There was pity, too; and that was worse.

It was too infernally familiar!

For an instant, a terrible instant, Deker thought all the eons of frustration were converging in his eyes, that he was going to cry.

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CHAPTER VIII

The City of Perl

BROUGHT into a room, Deker saw that it was queerly patterned, flooded with shifting hues of monochromatic lights. It was large, with a few couches, and a table supported by a single blossoming column from the ceiling. The two men motioned toward a couch and Deker sat down.

A small square in the wall slid to one side and a tray projected itself. There was a glass on it full of colorless liquid. One of the men motioned toward it with forced politeness.

"Drink, Sleeper. It will restore your strength."

"Not that you particularly care," thought Deker as he nodded and drank.

Immediately he felt strong, and the highly emotional feeling of desperate futility eased somewhat.

"This is an odd situation, socially," the man who had invited him to drink then said. "I hardly know how to approach you."

"Not as a human being," thought Deker. "Anything but that."

"You are so alien, you know," the man said, and Deker winced. "We're almost as shocked as you are. You have been something of a shrine since long before our objectively recorded history began. You have been a subject of much conjecture. Not even a High Scientist has been permitted to enter your vault. Your exact status and purpose has also been only conjecture.

"Frankly, we hardly expected you ever to awaken. Few even thought you were living, in the physico-chemical sense. This must be a great shock to you. Adjusting yourself to our highly advanced perfectly socialized culture will undoubtedly be difficult for you. We will, of course, help you all we can." He sounded dubious.

Deker said something vague; he didn't remember what. Then a man brought in some shorts and sandals, and Deker put them on. They were weightless and astonishingly thin, clinging to his flesh with an uncanny persistence.

The man who came bustling in then was obviously a man of real importance. He appeared older than anyone Deker had seen so far, though there were no outward physical signs of age. It was the light behind his eyes that was old. Somehow, he suggested Jak, of City Three, or perhaps it was only Deker's imagination.

"I'm Kahl, Mental Adjustment Specialist for World City," he said. "You'll need me soon enough, so let us begin readjustment proceedings right now, shall we? Of course you'll want to be reconditioned?"

He nodded to the two other men. They left.

Ominous despair thickened about Deker.

"Mental adjustment—reconditioning?" he heard himself murmuring.

He was sick. He was mad. He wanted to run far away, but there was no place to go.

"Naturally. This is my study. My laboratories adjoin. You see, everything in the City of Perl has his assigned duties to the city for which he is conditioned from his period of artificial semenation upward. Of course I don't know what your—er—scientific background is now. But you'll soon learn the rudiments of our glorious state."

Deker was staring. A wave of dizzy dampness swirled through the inchoate confusion of his mind. A queer crying tightness filled his throat.

"What? What did you say? The City of Perl!"

"Why yes. I suppose you would be more interested in our myths than our present day realities. The name, City of Perl, stems from the legendary beginning of our socialistic state. An odd myth, purely animistic of course. Incredibly enough, our species were savages in those days—gods and goddesses were born. Men saw many activities they could not emulate, they beheld the fall of the thunderbolt, the violence of the winds, the agitation of the waves. They imagined beings more powerful than themselves, capable of producing these great effects."

Deker listened, a chilling wind in his brain, a growing sense of magnificant irony and defeat in his feverish blood.

"There are legends from our beginning of two-headed gods and Cyclopean monsters—you know, with three eyes—and legends of animals that were like men and men who were like animals. And the myth of course includes a goddess, a race mother so to speak, called Perl. According to this quaint flowery legend, this Perl goddess brought great powers from the sun and destroyed the animals and bestowed her gifts on the savages who

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later formed our glorious city. Until the last five-thousand-year plan, our ancestors considered this Perl our race mother, in a sense, not too literally, of course. Interesting, but depressingly emotional and infantile, isn't it? But to get back to our program of reconditioning. You—"

BUT Deker wasn't listening now. He was thinking deeply while his heart cried out with regret, and his mind reeled with dim-remembered pain. If only he had waited with the hunchback! Perl the Anarch had listened to him, and had acted for humanity after all. Moved by his urging, she had returned to the ruins of City Three sometime after he had gone back to Nirvana. She had given those fear-haunted aborigines her power, and in time had overcome their psychic blockage against aggressive action so that they had been able to conquer the Beasts. But he could never know exactly what had happened in that fantastically distorted time eons before.

Deker wanted to cry out his frustration, the growing madness of this futile escape. But there was no turning back for him now. He asked how long he had been in the encystment capsule.

Kahl shook his head. "Your past has been repeatedly theorized upon for at least ten thousand years. You have emerged as part of that pre-objective barbaric myth pattern along with Perl, the race mother, and the others. Your origin is a mystery. There is no definite computation possible of the length of your—er—sleep."

"What city is this?" asked Deker.

"There is only one city. World City we prefer to call it rather than the City of Perl. One tremendous city. A perfect architectural symbol of man's omnipotence. We have found ruins of other cities scattered over the earth, a very inferior pre-dawn age culture, of course. At one time a former stage of psuedo-civilized humanity heavily populated the earth, living in many cities. The perfect cooperative socialized pattern and standardization of effort such as we have must have been impossible under those conditions."

"Yes," whispered Deker wearily. "It was indeed. But I can tell you this. Perl—she was no myth. She lived. It was—" He couldn't continue.

Explaining his origin, and his knowledge of dusty pasts was futile. Later he tried to explain again, several times, but he was part of irrational myth and legend. He told them about the Beasts and their accelerated evolutionary processes that were overtaking and surpassing man; of the Anarchs who had found the ultimate perfection of individualism, of how, even then, he had slept for 40,000 years.

He told them of that astonishingly older world order of the Hundred Cities Utopian Federation that had also been cooperative standardized perfection like World City, and of the Atom War that had destroyed that other "perfect" socialized civilization. He explained his ideas about the reality of the Perl Mother and of how she had destroyed the Beasts and returned the race to the pathway of progressive change.

He tried to make them understand the terrifying trap of the repetitive cycle of futility into which he had fallen. But it was impossible to convince them. There could never have been a civilization like theirs before, or it could not have perished.

World City had reached a state of mechanistic cooperative statism that made the Hundred Cities Federation seem like a form of anarchy. The inhabitants couldn't conceive of there ever having been any similar society, especially one that had destroyed itself. For how could socialized perfection reach such an illogical destructive end?

"Yes," Kahl was explaining to Deker a week later as Deker reported for his five hours of reconditioning, his suggestivity shots, his new integration checkup. "World City is probably man's ultimate and perfect system for survival."

"Yes, I know," said Deker. "You have reached it. Again!"

Deker was laughing inwardly. He remembered how the hunchback had laughed, and he imagined if he laughed aloud he would sound that way.

"These psycho-grams show a dubious possibility for your adjustment into our society," said Kahl.

He leaned over his desk, a tubular glass construction with row on row of info-screens connected with every library and branch director in World City.

"You understand that we sympathize with you, Deker," he said. "But you must also understand that there can be no such thing as 'individual' consideration, divorced from the broader and primary consideration of World City. At first I thought we might possibly recondition your mind so that eventual-

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ly you might be able to most satisfactorily serve the city and, indirectly, yourself. But you rejected that possibility because of your peculiarly primitive individualistic attitudes."

"That's true," said Deker, with a slow dry agony. "This time, I'm staying just as I am."

DEKER had decided on his second day in the City of Perl what he was going to do. Now he had had two weeks to study and plan; two weeks of maddening loneliness in another pseudo-perfectionistic socialistic culture in which he had no place. He moved now, carried out the first step of his violent repetitive plan. He had tried this once before and though it hadn't worked out, he would try it again. He hit Kahl on the point of the jaw.

It was not a forceful blow, but Kahl crumbled without a sound across his desk.

Deker had determined once more to try living alone. . . .

He went out through the dissolving wall, entered an elevator. He emerged finally onto a narrow ramp to which two atomurbinic aircraft were held by magnetic grapples. He jumped into one, conscious of the overpowering sense of inadequacy and nervous defeatism.

High above the endlessly stretching chrome-plated grandeur of the most colossal city the world had ever seen, he felt dwarfed into individual insignificance. He didn't like that feeling. He hated the city with a suffocating hate as he sent the atomurbinic machine streaking through the clear cold air high above the city.

Deker understood the principle upon which the aircraft operated. He intended to fly it to some desolate area in the North and try again to isolate himself, again live fully his eternal rôle as the pariah.

The turbine, almost as old as history itself, had been combined with atomic power to produce the only practical approach to an atomic-powered skycraft. The turbine, geared down considerably, turned a small propellor; and the exhaust gas from the turbine, although not essential for flight, gave an added boost to that supplied by the propellor. The critical size for the self-explosion of U-235 was much too large for small vehicles.

Once settled in a well-hidden spot, Deker intended to use the machine to set up a small efficient living unit with plenty of heat and power. That would be a good beginning for his fight to survive in the Northern wilderness.

Deker hadn't really expected to escape. But his flight ended much sooner than he anticipated. They cheated him out of even a brief thrill of flight.

An invisible magno-beam clamped on his plane. Electronic automatic radasoles severed the power circuit. He was held suddenly motionless and impotent in the air above the seemingly limitless expanse of World City. Other planes rose, took him down again and directly back to the Mental Readjustment Specialist, Kahl, who was waiting for him in stolid silence.

Five men stood behind Kahl for protection now. Three others held Deker, regarding him as little better than a mad savage.

"I knew you would rebel in some fashion," said Kahl sorrowfully. "It was evident on your thought tracings. But I was hardly prepared for such—such atavism, such barbaric methods. However, this quality of yours makes it much easier for me to conclude our conversation, which was so rudely interrupted."

Deker hardly listened. The gray cloud of defeat had thickened, dulling all sound and sight. He slumped there in stunned passive disillusionment and blighted hope. He heard distantly:

"We have considered returning you to this suspended animation from which you recently awoke. But that, according to our implacably just laws, demands your personal permission, and you have refused us that."

"Yes," mumbled Deker.

"So, Deker, there is only one alternative, one I have hitherto failed to mention because it was not certain then what your basic psychological characteristics were. Now I know. Now I'm sure the Ship is the only answer."

Deker said wearily. "What is this alternative?"

"This should appeal to your newly evidenced atavism," said Kahl. "Our glorious order has perfected—space travel!"

CHAPTER IX

Final Escape

HEARING what Kahl said, Deker began to laugh. He laughed until a wave of

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weakness stopped the laughter in a choking cry. He felt different after that. The face of Kahl was clearer, as was his voice.

"The research was started long ago, Deker," Kahl was explaining. "But according to our Council Judiciary Code, unless scientific discoveries or inventions are known to contribute directly to the progress of the city, they are not exploited. It is obvious that it would be a waste of city energy and time to develop interplanetary travel unless it could be shown to be of some benefit to the city. So far, no such benefit had been apparent until the concept of space flight was applied to the problem of our Unstables.

"Other than for that reason, space flight may never be necessary for World City. Our birth rate is perfectly regulated, you know. The population will remain at a chosen balanced level. Because everyone is perfectly satisfied, there is no pioneering spirit or desire to colonize—those being symptomatic of psychological maladjustment—as in your case.

"However,"—Kahl coughed delicately—"half a century ago a rather strange discovery was made in psycho-surgery. It was found that certain types of recalcitrants or abnormals suffered from inherent incurable anti-social attitudes. These exceptional cases are negativistic to our conditioning programs. We call these rare but somewhat persistent types Unstables."

"They've always had some sort of label," said Deker. "Imperfections within the perfect."

Yes, in a broad, terribly ironic sense, history did repeat itself—for him. But this certainly might be an unexpected way out. Space travel. He had come a long time to find it. Space travel. Something about the phrase lifted him, transported him celestially into some far height of elation.

Kahl had ignored his remark. "These Unstables appear now and then despite our most exhausting efforts to the contrary. They are erratically intelligent, capable in their own unique ways. But they are totally unsuited to our socialistic standardized system. Being unhappy, maladjusted themselves, this space travel as an escape method has appealed strongly to all our Unstables. They have been more than willing to volunteer as crew members to man the first known space ship from Earth."

"I can understand their reaction," said Deker.

"The first experimental flight is theoretically destined for the planet, Venus. You—have some acquaintinship with astronomy, Deker?"

"Vaguely," said Deker wryly.

"The Council has established a Solar Colonization Bureau which includes scientists who have been especially conditioned for this particular specialization. Well, Deker, are you interested?"

"I am," said Deker hoarsely. "You may never know how very interested."

"Of course there will be no returning," said Kahl. "That's part of the plan."

"That, too, is most agreeable to me," said Deker.

"Take him to the Unstable Wards," Kahl said to the men who were still holding Deker. "During the next few weeks he will undergo basic training under Morlo's supervision, and will get acquainted with his fellow crew members. I believe Deker will make Morlo a full crew." Kahl turned to Deker. "Good luck to you. You may feel proud that, in spite of your unfortunate background, your mysterious and unavoidable alienage, you have found a magnanimous and unforgettable place in the selfless history of our World City."

Deker was taken to the Unstable Wards. . . .

A reality Deker had never before known came in a burst of quickening, pulsing lust for life there in the Unstable Wards, there among his own kind, the maladjusted, the freaks, the men and women who were rebels and who could never fit into the social order.

After five weeks of basic training, Deker was with Giles, the chief astrogator, a fiery little man with flaring yellow hair, talking. They were aboard the Ship, standing on the little balcony ridge outside the control turret. Through the opaque glassite dome around them, they could see the distant gleam of the colossal city reflecting like a gigantic jewel against the night sky, and reflecting back again on the yellow desert sand on which the Ship's cradle had been constructed.

Giles was slowly recovering from a persecution complex contracted before he had finally volunteered as a crewman on the Ship. All the Unstables who made up the crew of the Ship were extremely capable, though neurotic. Deker had became pretty well acquainted with all of them, except the captain.

Now all of them were aboard to stay. They could never set foot on Earth again. During

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that week before blasting they were to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the Ship and with their specific duties.

THE Ship was a large blunt engine of inexhaustible atomic power, gleaming silver and black, with a platinum hull insulating it against heat. It could not be oxidized or burned.

It took Deker a long time to realize that he was assistant astrogator. But it had been easy for him. His mind seemed keener and more flexible now than it had ever been, fired with an enthusiasm he had never imagined himself capable of feeling. He knew a sharp sense of growing importance, of belonging, of serving a purpose.

The crew respected him for his knowledge and his mystery, a mystery he could never clarify for them. They couldn't conceive of there ever having been preceding cultures as great as he described.

But Deker had memories of many other kinds of social orders, including those jumbled sovereign governmental ideologies existing even before the Hundred Cities Federation—Democracy, Unionism, Syndicalism, Communism, Fascism, and countless others. Deker could remember many of them. And each had been a working system, including the Federated Utopia of the Hundred Cities, a fact inconceivable to these people of World City, or the City of Perl. His unbelievable revelations were considered the delusions of a high neurotic or even a potential psychotic.

"Space will cure you," they told him kindly.

He was convinced that it would. He knew that once out in space nothing concerning Earth would be of any importance again. Anyway, they were glad to be rid of him and the other Unstables. The Ship was the only legal method they could utilize to rid their perfectly balanced order of its erratic elements. Capital punishment was, of course, not only illegal, but incomprehensible.

The only alternative to sending the Unstables away in the Ship were the Reconditioning Wards, but these Unstables wouldn't recondition. They either were completely negativistic, or they merely changed their form of instability.

Deker had spent his time wandering through the Ship, luxuriating in its beauty and gleaming utilitarian power, and he had become thoroughly familiar with its most minute part. He had come to know every crew member well, but he hadn't met the captain at all.

"The captain is a hard person to get along with," Giles was saying, "even if you manage to meet informally."

"Why is the captain so hard to see?" asked Deker indifferently.

"I don't know, exactly," said the fiery little Giles. "They say the captain is a brooding introspective neurotic, whatever that means. Spends all the time alone."

"But the symptoms of Unstables," said Deker, "are symptoms of our desire to escape World City and all the things it represents. Surely the captain should have a new attitude now that we are getting away from World City entirely."

Giles grinned slyly. "Deker, you have an amazingly intuitive grasp of so many fields of learning, especially the workings of the human mind. Sometimes I almost feel that you are a traveler through time, that you actually have known pasts and peoples of which we cannot even dream. Anyway, maybe you can help the captain."

Giles looked at his chronodisk.

"The captain retires every night at precisely twenty-four hundred," he said. "You still have an hour. I think it would be an excellent idea if you talked with the captain. You have such a remarkable understanding of mental processes that you might be of benefit. And it will be unpleasant out there"—he motioned toward the stars—"with a captain who remains a neurotic. It might be disastrous."

Deker saw some kind of ulterior motive gleaming in Giles' eyes. He shrugged.

"All right, Giles. I've got to meet this mysterious captain anyway. And I'm sure he won't make the first gesture. . . ."

Deker felt entirely at ease, confident, strong and proud in the brown heavy-duty plasticloth space suit as he made his way to the Captain's room. He knocked lightly on the metal door. There was a long pause. Deker felt unexpectedly ill at ease as he hesitantly knocked again. There was a tense feeling of suspense he could not analyze. And then the captain opened the door and stood framed in its opening, looking at him.

His mind reeled. He stumbled back, blinked, tried to speak. But he could only gasp while his mind plummeted back through time to a wild scene at the foothills of high mountains, a running stream, a singing hunchback, a high lonely tower with an

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opening, an opening framing a face.

This girl's—the captain's face!

Her red-gold hair. Her captain's uniform was a glossy black, snug-fitting so that the highlights of her beautiful figure had a shine on them. Her arrogant blue eyes—yes, they were the same blue—were brooding as they studied him.

SHE was Perl! Physically, there was not one minute difference. Everything about her was Perl, except the uniform. The red-gold hair, the blue eyes, the probing gaze, other intangible qualities only Deker would remember. It seemed to be Perl, but Deker had grown suspicious, distrustful of reality evaluated temporally.

The cycles spiraled without end, with inevitable repetitions. Only details seemed to alter. But given time, even all the most minute details might return.

Deker brushed a hand over his face.

"Perl—" he mumbled once, then managed to get hold of himself, stiffened, bowed slightly. "I thought it was about time I introduced myself," he said. "I'm Deker. Perhaps you've heard about the man who has been sleeping in the encystment vault. I am that man."

She stepped aside, invited him in. It was a small, delicate, feminine room, draped in blue. Incense burned. She motioned to a capacious couch, but she sat in a deep chair facing him. Her voice was soft, gentle, persuasive.

"You are the man who speaks of lost times no one believes ever were?"

"Yes," said Deker in a husky whisper. Even her voice was Perl's voice.

"What would you say if I said that I believed you—Deker?" Her eyes were infinitely soft, deep, as he looked into them. "For I do believe your tales of the past. For I have dreamed the same things. All the horror and darkness and terrifying vistas which you have spoken of, I have experienced in my dreams."

"I've traveled a long time, come a long way," said Deker. "But this ship ends the quest for me The Ship is the chimera and we have found it. Maybe out there, given time, I can make you understand. All these years—eons—I've been trying to escape. I'm beginning to realize now what I was trying to escape from. It was Earth."

"Then this isn't the end for you—for us, Deker. But the beginning. . . ."

The endlessness of space opened for Deker after that. The feeling of futility and of uselessness, and of not belonging, the sense of hopeless dusty dreariness and despair of spinning cycles—it all dropped away with the fading dull red ball of Earth. And he knew none of it would ever obsess him again.

The feeling of inferiority, of being an abnormality—that fell away too. For he knew that he and his kind did belong, that they belonged to something incredibly vaster than the smug immediacy of the systems which had created them, and then rejected them as unfit.

They would die down there in their own narrow complacency and auto-delusion. His kind would always rebel and escape into space. His kind had always rebelled, sought newness, and escape from the dull finalities in search of the broader meanings.

His arm was about Perl's slim waist. She used another name now, but to him she would always be Perl. Perl the Anarch who had changed, and saved the human species from decay and death. They stood in the control turret watching the receding Earth in the ultraview screen.

Dimly, in a haze, Deker saw the sun setting beyond the Earth, surrounded by its corona and zodiacal light. Beyond it he saw the moon, slightly blue, with a white rim. The Earth was all dark except where the sun splattered down on its far half, a pool of light, bright white in its center and graduating outward into dissipating orange and brown.

Then the whole scene was gone, and there was a mind-reeling blackness with only stark cold dots of untwinkling white.

Deker looked at the blue and white astrocharts. His arm tightened about Perl's pliant waist. The Earth was gone. And he knew that it was gone forever.

"This is what we've been searching for," he heard himself whispering. "They'll never have any problem with people like us any more. It was a disease. It's cured now. We were Earthbound, but now we're free!"

Venus waited for Deker and the captain he called Perl, and the rest of the crew of the Ship. And beyond Venus—infinity.

Next Issue: THE FACELESS MEN, a Novel by Arthur Leo Zagat

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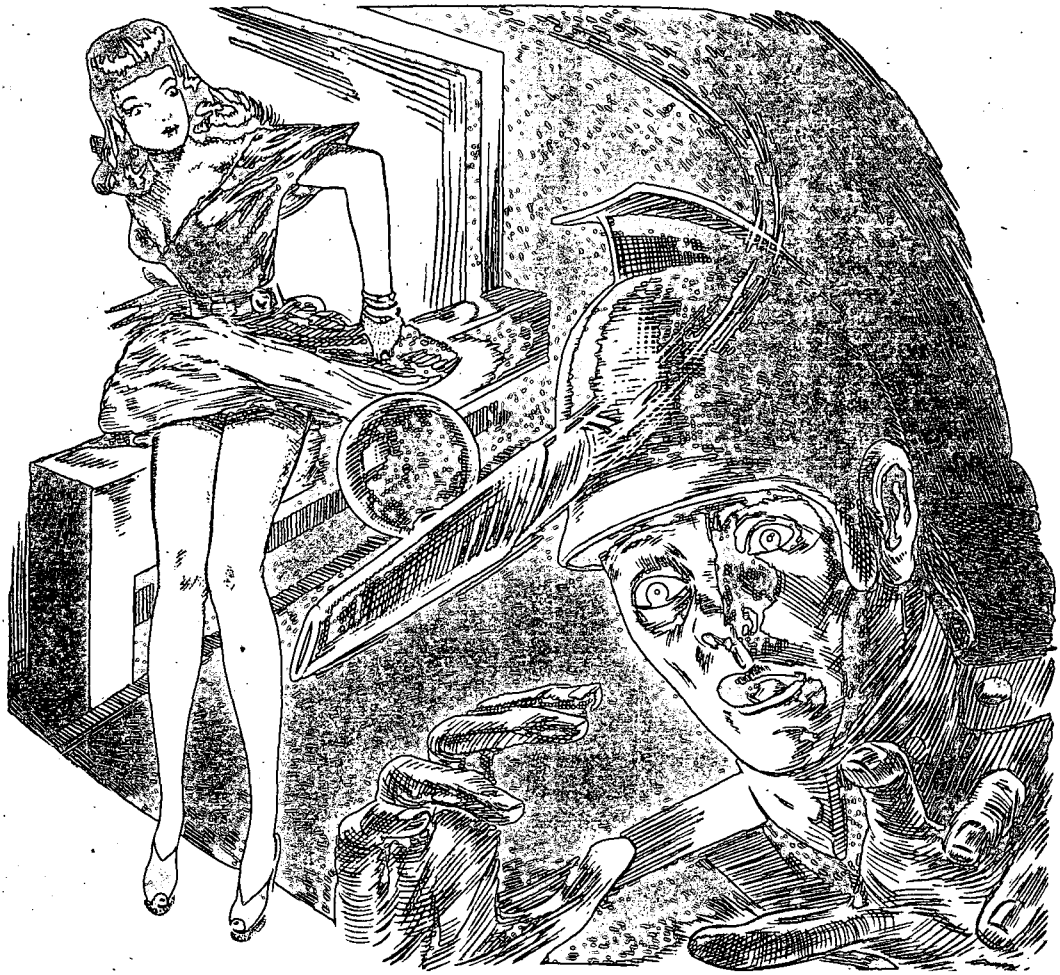

The Dobridust ricochetted from the ceiling and narrowly missed the U.N.B.I. man's head

THE DOBRIDUST

By MARGARET ST. CLAIR

This little gadget gave Oona and plenty of other folks more than a headache when it went around doing things!

"GOT sump'n for you, honey," Jick said. "Had quite a lot of trouble getting it out." He reached up inside his jumper, began a series of strenuous contortions, and at last pulled out a flat brown parcel, wrapped in preemitex. "Fox forgot to give me a property pass for it, and the guards were stopping everybody tonight. Here." He handed the parcel to her.

Oona took it gingerly. She wished Jick would stop bringing things home from the space port. About half the time Fox, his leaderman, forgot to give him property passes for the stuff he salvaged, and that meant Jick had to smuggle it out. And only last week she'd read, in the *U.N. Space Port Reporter,* that a man who had been caught carrying out five pork chops had been sen-

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tenced to three years on Pluto and a five thousand I.U. fine.

Jick's biggest coup so far had been smuggling out six badly-scratched stereo records from the library of a cruiser which was being decommissioned. (Fox had been on vacation at the time.) The records had turned out to be the first parts of six different stereo plays. Three years on Pluto—it simply wasn't worth while.

"What it is?" she asked. "Something nice, Jick?"

"Open it and see."

Oona pulled the strips of stick-tape from the parcel and crumpled up the silky sheets of preemitex. The overall length of the thing Jick had brought her was about twenty centimeters. It was a small, heavy gadget consisting of three parts: a flattened, gold-colored tube which grew wider at one end, a big silvery bulb perched about midway on the tube, and a latex bag, also attached to the tube and open at one end. Everywhere there was room for the legend, the metal had been stamped with the words, "Property of U.N. Space Port."

"What is it?" Oona asked.

"It's a Dobridust. You remember me telling you about them, don't you? Of course I'll have to put a new coil in this one, and one or two of the connections need working on and I'll have to clean it and fix the fan. I picked it up off the trash pile. But I can fix it so it'll be as good as new. And I'll bet there isn't another woman in the country who has one of them. They haven't even got them on all the space liners yet."

A Dobridust. The name sounded sort of snaky and unpleasant. Oona searched her memory. What was it Jick had said about the gadget? Oh, yes, she remembered. It was an automatic wall-cleaner, standard equipment on all the newer liners.

You started it in high up on one wall, and it worked its way all around the room, cleaning as it went. It wasn't ever supposed to be shut off. As soon as it finished one room, it went on to the next, and when it had done the whole ship, it went back to the room it had been started in. Jick had compared it to painting which had been a continuous operation on the ocean vessels of a generation ago.

"I'll see if I can get it fixed tonight," Jick said. "It ought to make things a lot easier for you, kid. I understand that Dobri, the man who invented it, claims that it leaves a surface it's been over antiseptically clean. See the latex bag? Well, the dirt the tube takes up is transmuted into oxygen and comes out the end of the bag."

"Um."

"You don't seem very pleased," Jick said, a faint hint of reproach in his voice.

"Oh, I am. Terribly pleased. Only—well, I wish it didn't say 'Property of U.N. Space Port' all over it."

"Why, what difference does that make?"

"Well, if one of those UNBI agents came around, as I read they are doing in the *U.N. Space Port Reporter,* it might cause a lot of trouble. I wouldn't want anything to happen to you, Jick."

Jick drew her to him and gave her a hearty hug. "Why, you poor little thing," he said fondly, "always finding something to worry about. Just dismiss it from your mind, honey. There isn't a chance in the world a UNBI man would come here. . . ."

THE Dobridust, when Jick had put it in working order, proved quite a bit more satisfactory than Oona had thought it would. True, it didn't save her any work, because it kept the walls so clean she was always having to go over the floors and ceilings to keep them from looking simply filthy by comparison. And once it got started cleaning it couldn't be stopped until it ran out of energy pellets, when it sank softly down on the floor.

Still, it wasn't any trouble to operate, and Oona was glad she had it. The worst thing about it was the way it bumped softly against the door and whining, like a dog wanting to go out, when it had finished with one room and wanted to go on to the next. It made Oona quite nervous until she got used to it.

Time went on. The next five months were full ones. A new couple, the Conways, moved into the neighborhood, and Matta Conway was in and out of the house so much that Oona wasn't quite sure she liked it, especially since Matta had a high voice like a Venusian zygodactyl and swore like a drunken astrogator. Mr. Conway worked at the space port on the early shift.

Then Jick had his vacation, and he and Oona spent it on the moon. They stayed at the Hotel Brahe, on the slopes of Mt. Tycho, and even made a couple of trips to the dark side and brought back chunks of fossilized edelweiss for souvenirs. It was fun, though

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they did have to be in space suits most of the time.

After they returned to Terra, Oona got into a tangle with, and defeated, a burglar who was armed with a sliver gun. Jick made quite a fuss about it because, as he said, she might have been killed or at least hurt. He kept saying she must be the bravest woman in the system. Oona knew that wasn't true—gee, nobody could have been more scared of that old burglar and his sliver gun than she was, with Jick out of town and everything—and she kept trying to tell Jick so. But if that burglar had thought she was going to sit there like a quohaug while he picked up her new palladium wristlets with the hand-incised adornments and put them in his sac just as if they belonged to him, he was very much mistaken. What else could she do except throw the celestial globe at him, kick her sandals in his face, and tie him up while he was still unconscious?

SO IT was no wonder that by the end of October, when it was Oona's turn to entertain her Maroola club again, her early nervousness about the Dobridust had almost vanished. She had to plan the menu for the club (mangosteen, avocado and custard apple salad, with whipped bovula cream dressing, little soya rolls with cheese filling, and geela nut torte with more whipped bovula cream); get a new frock; have her hair garnished with azurite dust and get a re-montage on her fingernails; and try to find time to scan the novels of the month on the stereo, so she'd have something to talk about.

By 14:30 on the afternoon of the second, half an hour before the Maroola club was slated to arrive, Oona was all done. She'd only got to scan two of the novels, but it didn't really matter because a lot of the girls never scanned anything. She was just putting the finishing touches, with a weighted polishing brush, to the carnauba coating on the centerpiece of petrified corymbite, when someone chimed at the door.

Oona went to answer it, noting absently that the Dobridust, from the noise its motor was making and the way it was fluttering up and down over the door, must be about to run out of energy pellets. A tall, distinguished man was facing her.

"How do you do, Mrs. Ritterbush," he said, stepping inside the vestibule. He was beautifully dressed. He was wearing a gray chargé d'affaires suit with epaulet lapels (Jick would look swell in one of them), and the press down the sides of his trousers was so sharp you could have split a nucleus with it.

"My name is Petersen." He fumbled in his pocket and got out a little case, opened it, and held it out for Oona to see. There was some sort of medal in it. "These are my credentials. I'm from the UNBI."

Oona stared at him. Her hands, slippery with wax, tightened on the handle of the polishing brush. The UNBI . . . how . . . what . . . Jick. . . . The *UNBI!*

"Would you allow me to search your house?" Petersen went on. "We have received information to the effect that someone in this neighborhood is smuggling D—"

Oona gave a convulsive start. The polishing brush soared out of her hands. It flew into the air, seemed to hesitate for a moment, and then struck, hard, against the Dobridust. Whereupon, the Dobridust made a power-dive on to Petersen's skull.

What do you do when you've just assaulted a UNBI man, Oona thought as she stared frantically at the recumbent Petersen. It had been an accident, pure and simple, but nobody would believe it after the way she'd handled the burglar with the sliver gun. If they gave you three years on Pluto for smuggling out a few pork chops, what did they do to you if you hit a UNBI agent on the head? Hit him with a smuggled Dobridust, too, which made it that much worse. Oona felt like wringing her hands.

She hunted for his pulse and was relieved to find that his heart was still beating. But what was she to do? The girls from the Maroola club would be here in—Oona glanced at her chronometer and winced—in not more than ten minutes. If she could only sit down somewhere with her head between her hands and think!

For a wild moment Oona's thoughts played with the garbage reducer in the kitchen. If she—what if she— Then she was dragging Petersen with frantic haste toward the pneumoport. By the time the first of her guests arrived, she had stowed him neatly under its broad surface, his hands crossed on his chest. Feeling like a murderer who is getting rid of the weapon, Oona pushed the Dobridust in after him and smoothed out the cover on the pneumoport. There! It didn't show at all.

It didn't show at all, but Oona, looking at

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the broad cinnabar stripes on the pneumoport's upholstery, flinched. Stripes, in her present predicament, seemed altogether too pointed an allusion to Pluto and the costume in the penal colony there. Stripes—The door chime rang.

It was Jobella and Dorna Lee, and in the next few minutes the other members of the Maroola club arrived. By 15:00, the tables had been set up and they were all at play.

Oona was so distraught that in the first game she built her citadel out of six green hexagons and one white, instead of all olivine, and in the second she absent-mindedly picked up three of Rosetta's hexagons and tried to go loo with them.

MATTA CONWAY was sitting nearest the pneumoport. She kept leaning over and taking off her sandals (because, as she said, they hurt her feet) and leaning over and putting them on again (because, as she said, she might as well get used to them), until Oona thought she'd go crazy. Oona's playing got so bad that Jobella pinched up her face and was just about to make one of her sarcastic remarks, when Oona took the wind out of her sails by saying that she was worried about the geela nut torte and wanted to go look at it.

Once out in the kitchen, Oona leaned against the cool metal of the chronnox and tried to think. No ideas came. Even if Petersen stayed unconscious until the club meeting was over, she'd still have to do *something* with him. And if he came to earlier . . . .

The girls complimented Oona lavishly on her salad and her rolls, but the food was like sawdust in her mouth. She kept looking at the pneumoport. What was it like on Pluto? So cold, so far away. Would they let her and Jick have the same cell?

She was just collecting the plates and carrying them out to the kitchen, preparatory to serving the torte, when there was a faint whirr from the pneumoport. Oona froze in her tracks. She knew at once what it was. That darned old Dobridust hadn't entirely used up its energy charge yet, and it was trying to get out. Or maybe falling on Petersen's skull had damaged its mechanism somehow. It had certainly damaged him. Oh, if she'd only thought to put it in the garbage reducer the day Jick brought it home!

"There's something under your pneumoport, Oona," Dorna Lee said, leaning forward and listening interestedly. There was a faint bumping and then a whine. "Sounds like some sort of animal."

"Maybe we ought to move it out and see what it is," Jobella offered brightly. "We could all pull on it at once."

Oona felt her blood congeal.

"Oh, let sleeping mice lie," Matta Conway said, running her fingers through the heap of hexagons on the table. "I certainly don't feel like hauling any old pneumoport around, after all that rich food. Besides, maybe Oona empties her ash trays under it. We wouldn't want to embarrass her, would we?"

Everybody laughed. Oona could have hugged Matta, even if her voice did get a little bit too shrill once in a while.

After they had finished with the torte (the girls told Oona over and over again how zestful it was) Oona thawed out some cheese nuggets and put them on the tables and they played some more. After a time Oona managed to excuse herself by saying that the colors of the hexagons were giving her a headache.

There had been no further noise from the pneumoport, but while the others doubled and worked on their citadels, she found herself looking furtively at its striped upholstery and wondering what was going on under it. Was Petersen dead yet? And if he really had died, how long would it be before he began to—to— Oh, why had Mr. Dobri invented that horrid thing, anyhow? Wasn't there enough machinery already in the world?

The girls were playing their last hand when the door chimes sounded again. Oona got up and went into the vestibule to answer them. So much had happened already that she didn't see what more in the way of disaster could be waiting for her, but she felt sure that something was.

The man at the door was tall and distinguished, and even before he got out his little credential case Oona knew who he was. His name, it appeared, was Havenner, and Petersen had been supposed to report to him at 16:30. Her house was the last place Petersen was known to have visited. Had she seen anything of him?

Oona licked her lips. Assaulting another UNBI man just wasn't practical, even if the girls hadn't been listening. She knew they were because the hum of conversation had died away completely. But if she told this

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man the truth—Pluto! On the other hand, lying to him, she couldn't help feeling, would be getting into deep waters indeed. It had been a long time since she had studied civics in school, but she had a nervous recollection that it was one of the things that came under the head of Treason against the Human Race.

OONA didn't know what she was going to say. She opened her mouth, but before any words came out there was a bumping noise behind her and then a couple of shrill feminine eeks. Her heart thudding, Oona hurried back into the living room to see what the matter was.

It was the Dobridust again. A great whirring and thumping was coming from under the pneumoport, and Jobella, pale but determined, was lifting up on its end. As Oona watched, she got it up eight or ten centimeters, and the Dobridust came whizzing out.

Jobella dropped the end of the pneumoport with a bang. The girls began to scream. And the Dobridust, after circling the walls once at high speed, like a comet with an eccentric orbit, darted into the vestibule. Oona raced after it. Maybe she could catch it before Mr. Havenner saw what it was.

The Dobridust was hurtling around the walls of the vestibule like an infuriated ryoorg. As it moved, it emitted a high, thin wail. The UNBI man, who seemed to be quick-witted, was slapping at it with his hat every time it came near him, but it always evaded him. Bits of plastic and pigmenoid chipped from the wall. The only grain of comfort Oona could find in the situation was that the thing was moving so fast he couldn't possibly recognize it for what it was.

On the Dobridust's fourth or fifth circuit of the room, Oona leaped into the air and snatched at it. She missed, but the motive force imparted to the Dobridust by her hand sent it caroming against the ceiling. It ricocheted back, seemed to be thinking what to do next, and then plummeted down on Havenner's head.

Two UNBI men— Oona closed her eyes.

When she opened them a fraction of a second later, Havenner was slumped back against the rear of the vestibule, his eyes glassy, and the Dobridust was lying at his feet. Oona picked it up and shook it. Nothing happened. Its power charge seemed to be exhausted; so did Mr. Havenner's.

From the corner of her eye, Oona saw that the girls had clambered up on top of the Maroola tables and were huddled together there, shrieking from time to time. Presumably, they thought the Dobridust was some sort of maddened animal. They wouldn't stay there long, though. In a minute or two they'd be out in the vestibule, wanting to know what had happened. She'd better do something quick. Oona clutched at her brow.

Well, Jick had a new power-saw with a supra-diamond blade. It was guaranteed to cut any surface, natural or man-made, up to and including 12 on the Mohs scale. She might— On the whole, though, it would probably be better to put him in the clothes locker.

Oona took hold of Havenner's collar. He opened his eyes and looked at her. From the room behind them came a series of mighty bumps and a renewed burst of shrieks.

Mr. Petersen was crawling out from under the pneumoport. There was a piece of fluff in his hair and a trace of dust on his lapels, but he still had dignity. His expression was reserved and stern.

"You're under arrest," he said. He sneezed.

Dumbly, Oona held out her wrists for the manacles. Now that the moment had come, she felt certain relief. Pluto was a long, long way from Terra, of course, but there wouldn't be any Dobridust there, and it would be sort of cozy in a cell. Quiet. Safe.

"Not you," Petersen said with a touch of asperity. "Her." He gestured toward Matta Conway who was eyeing him warily from the top of the Maroola table. "I might have realized Martian Mattie would be at the bottom of this. Will you come quietly?"

Oona hadn't realized until then just how vigorously Matta could curse. . . .

IT TOOK Oona a little while to get things straightened out after Matta had been taken away.

Petersen, it seemed, hadn't been as much damaged by the Dobridust as she had thought. In fact he had recovered consciousness while she was stuffing him under the pneumoport, but he had decided to keep quiet and see what she was up to. He had realized even at the time the Dobridust fell on him that it had been an accident. He said that while he'd been under the pneumoport, he'd seen some very interesting things.

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"What?" Oona asked. She looked apprehensively at Havenner, who was holding Mr. Dobri's unfortunate invention in one hand. Maybe the UNBI men hadn't been after her and Jick in the first place, but when they really did put their attention on the Dobridust, there was going to be trouble. She could tell there would.

"Mrs. Conway was using the underside of your pneumoport as a repository for dope," Petersen said. "Every time she went through that hocus-pocus with her sandals this afternoon, she got one of the packages of dope out from under the couch and put it in her sandal sole."

"Dope?" Oona asked. "In my pneumoport? How'd it get there?"

"Mrs. Conway put it there," Petersen explained patiently. "Her husband was working at the spaceport, and he had contacts with several IDPs. That's what we call illicit drug purveyors. He passed the stuff on to Matta, and she hid it in your house. We were sure the trial led to your neighborhood, and we searched the Conways' place when they were out, but could find nothing."

Oona sighed. She was feeling dreadfully tired. She reached behind her for a cheese nugget and began absently to chew on it.

"By the way, where did you get this?" Havenner said. He held the Dobridust out toward Oona. The letters that made up the iterated legend, "Property of U.N. Space Port" had never looked so large. They showed up like a space-bridging beacon against a polarized field at night.

Oona tried to say something but couldn't. A piece of cheese nugget had slipped down the wrong way, and all she could do was stand there with her face red and her eyes watering and sputter crumbs.

"Why, she got it at Bracey's," Petersen said, coming to her aid. "They put a couple of thousand of them on sale in their U.N. Surplus Shop last week. My wife bought one. Handy things."

"H'um." Havenner examined the Dobridust more closely. "I don't know," he said at last. "Might be dangerous to have around if it got out of order. What do you think, Mrs. Ritterbush?"

Oona swallowed the last of her cheese nugget. She licked a few stray crumbs from the corners of her mouth.

"I guess it could be," she said thoughtfully. "If something went wrong, I mean."

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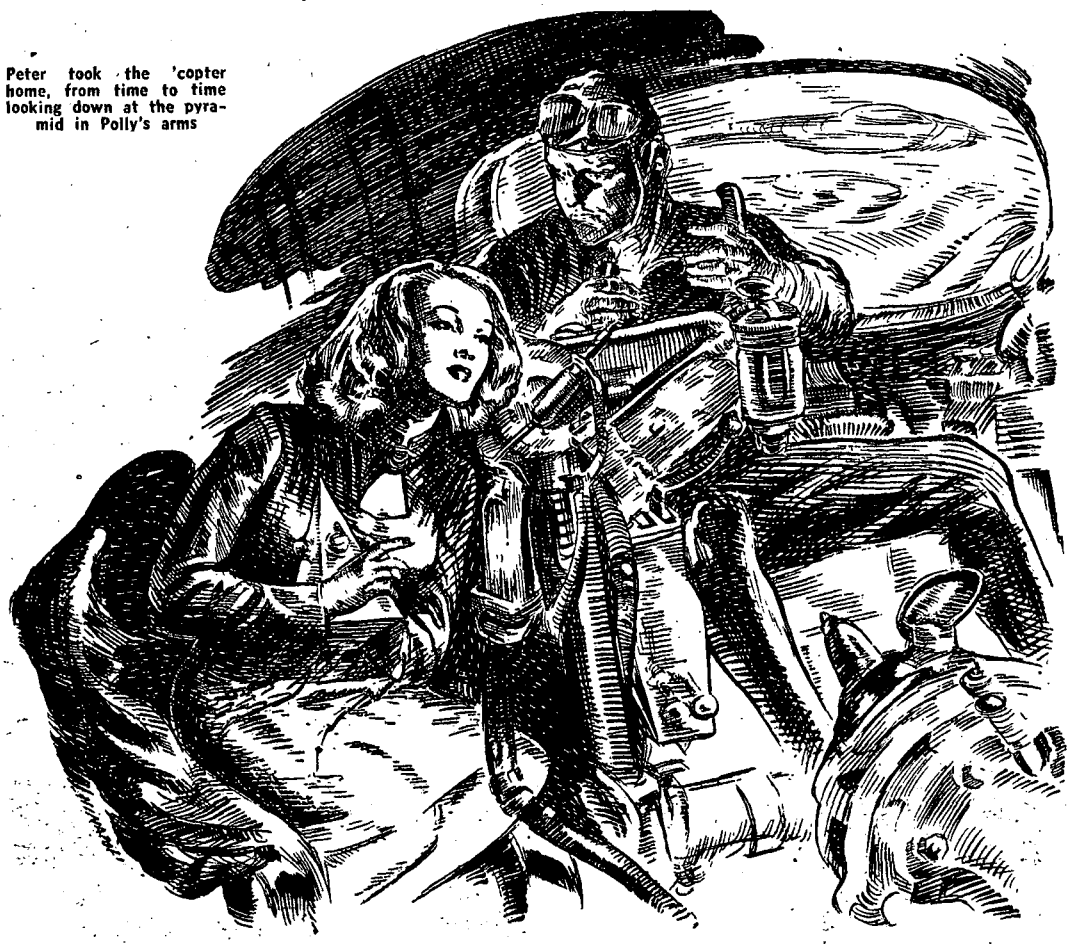

Peter took the 'copter home, from time to time looking down at the pyramid in Polly's arms

The Shape of Things

By RAY BRADBURY

Neither Peter Horn nor his wife ever expected that their child would be a small blue pyramid of another dimension!

HE DID not want to be the father of a small blue pyramid. Peter Horn hadn't planned it that way at all. Neither he nor his wife imagined that such a thing could happen to them. They had talked quietly for days about the birth of their coming child, they had eaten normal foods, slept a great deal, taken in a few shows, and, when it was time for her to fly in the helicopter to the hospital, her husband, Peter Horn, laughed and kissed her.

"Honey, you'll be home in six hours," he said. "These new birth-mechanisms do everything but father the child for you."

She remembered an old-time song. "No, no, they can't take *that* away from me!" and sang it, and they laughed as the helicopter lifted them over the green way from country to city.

The doctor, a quiet gentleman named Wol-

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cott, was very confident. Polly Ann, the wife, was made ready for the task ahead and the father was put, as usual, out in the waiting room where he could suck on cigarettes or take highballs from a convenient mixer. He was feeling pretty good. This was the first baby, but there was not a thing to worry about. Polly Ann was in good hands.

Dr. Wolcott came into the waiting room an hour later. He looked like a man who has seen death. Peter Horn, on his third highball, did not move. His hand tightened on the glass and he whispered:

"She's dead."

"No," said Wolcott, quietly. "No, no, she's fine. It's the baby."

"The baby's dead, then."

"The baby's alive, too, but—drink the rest of that drink and come along after me. Something's happened."

Yes, indeed, something had happened. The "something" that had happened had brought the entire hospital out into the corridors. People were going and coming from one room to another. As Peter Horn was led through a hallway where attendants in white uniforms were standing around peering into each others faces and whispering, he became quite sick. The entire thing had the air of a carnival, as if at any moment someone might step up upon a platform and cry:

"Hey, looky looky! The child of Peter Horn! Incredible!"

They entered a small clean room. There was a crowd in the room, looking down at a low table. There was something on the table.

A small blue pyramid.

"Why've you brought me here?" said Horn, turning to the doctor.

The small blue pyramid moved. It began to cry.

PETER HORN pushed forward and looked down wildly. He was very white and he was breathing rapidly. "You don't mean that's it?"

The doctor named Wolcott nodded.

The blue pyramid had six blue snake-like appendages, and three eyes that blinked from the tips of projecting structures.

Horn didn't move.

"It weighs seven pounds, eight ounces," someone said.

Horn thought to himself, they're kidding me. This is some joke. Charlie Ruscoll is behind all this. He'll pop in a door any moment and cry "April Fool!" and everybody'll laugh. That's not my child. Oh, horrible! They're kidding me.

Horn stood there, and the sweat rolled down his face.

Dr. Wolcott said, quietly. "We didn't dare show your wife. The shock. She mustn't be told about it—now."

"Get me away from here." Horn turned and his hands were opening and closing without purpose, his eyes were flickering.

Wolcott held his elbow, talking calmly. "This is your child. Understand that, Mr. Horn."

"No. No, it's not." His mind wouldn't touch the thing. "It's a nightmare. Destroy the thing!"

"You can't kill a human being."

"Human?" Horn blinked tears. "That's not human! That's a crime against God!"

The doctor went on, quickly. "We've examined this—child—and we've decided that it is not a mutant, a result of gene destruction or rearrangement. It's not a freak. Nor is it sick. Please listen to everything I say to you."

Horn stared at the wall, his eyes wide and sick. He swayed. The doctor talked distantly, with assurance.

"The child was somehow affected by the birth pressure. There was a dimensional distructure caused by the simultaneous short-circuitings and malfunctionings of the new birth-mechs and the hypnosis machines. Well, anyway," the doctor ended lamely, "your baby was born into—another dimension."

Horn did not even nod. He stood there, waiting.

Dr. Wolcott made it emphatic. "Your child is alive, well, and happy. It is lying there, on the table. But because it was born into another dimension it has a shape alien to us. Our eyes, adjusted to a three dimensional concept, cannot recognize it as a baby. But it *is*. Underneath that camouflage, the strange pyramidal shape and appendages, it is *your* child."

Horn closed his mouth and shut his eyes and wanted to think. "Can I have a drink?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Wolcott. "Here." A drink was thrust into Horn's hands.

"Now, let me just sit down, sit down somewhere a moment." Horn sank wearily into a chair. It was coming clear. Everything

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shifted slowly into place. It was his child, no matter what. He shuddered. No matter how horrible it looked, it was his first child.

At last he looked up and tried to see the doctor. "What'll we tell Polly?" His voice was hardly a whisper. It was tired.

"We'll work that out this morning, as soon as you feel up to it."

"What happens after that? Is there any way to—change it back?"

"We'll try. That is, if you give us permission to try. After all, it's your child. You can do anything with him you want to do."

"Him?" Horn laughed ironically, shutting his eyes. "How do you know it's a him?" He sank down into darkness. His ears roared.

Wolcott was visibly upset. "Why, we—that is—well, we don't know, for sure."

Horn drank more of his drink. "What if you *can't* change him back?"

"I realize what a shock it is to you, Mr. Horn. If you can't bear to look upon the child, we'll be glad to raise him here, at the Institute, for you."

Horn thought it over. "Thanks. But he's still my kid. He still belongs to me and Polly. I'll raise him. I'll give him a home. Raise him like I'd raise any kid. Give him a normal home life. Try to learn to love him. Treat him right." His lips were numb, he couldn't think.

"You realize what a job you're taking on, Mr. Horn? This child can't be allowed to have normal playmates, why, they'd pester it to death in no time. You know how children are. If you decide to raise the child at home, his life will be strictly regimented, he must *never* be seen by anyone. Is that clear?"

"Yeah. Yeah, it's clear. Doc. Doc, is he okay *mentally?*"

"Yes. We've tested his reactions. He's a fine healthy child as far as nervous response and such things go."

"I just wanted to be sure. Now, the only problem is Polly."

WOLCOTT frowned. "I confess that one has me stumped. You know it is pretty hard on a woman to hear that her child has been born dead. But *this*, telling a woman she's given birth to something not recognizable as human. It's not as clean as death. There's too much chance for shock. And yet I must tell her the truth. A doctor gets nowhere by lying to his patient."

Horn put his glass down. "I don't want to lose Polly, too. I'd be prepared now, if you destroyed the child, to take it. But I don't want Polly killed by the shock of this whole thing."

"I think we may be able to change the child back. That's the point which makes me hesitate. If I thought the case was hopeless I'd make out a certificate of euthanasia immediately. But it's at least worth a chance."

Horn was very tired. He was shivering quietly, deeply. "All right, doctor. It needs food, milk and love until you can fix it up. It's had a raw deal so far, no reason for it to go on getting a raw deal. When will we tell Polly?"

"Tomorrow afternoon, when she wakes up."

Horn got up and walked to the table which was warmed by a soft illumination from overhead. The blue pyramid sat upon the table as Horn held out his hand.

"Hello, baby," said Horn.

The blue pyramid looked up at Horn with three bright blue eyes. It shifted a tiny blue tendril, touching Horn's fingers with it.

Horn shivered.

"Hello, baby."

The doctor produced a special feeding bottle.

"This is woman's milk. Here, baby."

* * * * *

Baby looked upward through clearing mists. Baby saw the shapes moving over him and knew them to be friendly. Baby was new-born, but already alert, strangely alert. Baby was aware.

There were moving objects above and around Baby. Six cubes of a gray-white color, bending down. Six cubes with hexagonal appendages and three eyes to each cube. Then there were two other cubes coming from a distance over a crystalline plateau. One of the cubes was white. It had three eyes, too. There was something about this White Cube that Baby liked. There was an attraction. Some relation. There was an odor to the White Cube that reminded Baby of itself.

Shrill sounds came from the six bending down gray-white cubes. Sounds of curiosity and wonder. It was like a kind of piccolo music, all playing at once.

Now the two newly arrived cubes, the

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White Cube, and the Gray Cube, were whistling. After awhile the White Cube extended one of its hexagonal appendages to touch Baby. Baby responded by putting out one of its tendrils from its pyramidal body. Baby liked the White Cube. Baby liked. Baby was hungry. Baby liked. Maybe the White Cube would give it food . . .

The Gray Cube produced a pink globe for Baby. Baby was now to be fed. Good. Good. Baby accepted food eagerly.

Food was good. All the gray-white cubes drifted away, leaving only the nice White Cube standing over Baby looking down and whistling over and over. Over and over.

* * * * *

They told Polly the next day. Not everything. Just enough. Just a hint. They told her the baby was not well, in a certain way. They talked slowly, and in every tightening circles, in upon Polly. Then Dr. Wolcott gave a long lecture on the birth-mechanisms, how they helped a woman in her labor, and how the birth-mechs were put together, and how, this time, they short-circuited. There was another man of scientific means present and he gave her a dry little talk on dimensions, holding up his fingers, so! one two three and four. Still another man talked of energy and matter. Another spoke of underprivileged children.

Polly finally sat up in bed and said, "What's all the talk for? What's wrong with my baby that you should all be talking so long?"

Wolcott *told* her.

"Of course, you can wait a week and see it," he said. "Or you can sign over guardianship of the child to the Institute."

"There's only one thing I want to know," said Polly.

DR. WOLCOTT raised his brows.

"Did I *make* the child that way?" asked Polly.

"You most certainly did *not!*"

"The child isn't a monster, genetically?" asked Polly.

"The child was thrust into another continuum. Otherwise, it is perfectly normal."

Polly's tight, lined mouth relaxed. She said, simply, "Then, bring me my baby. I want to see him. Please. Now."

They brought the "child."

The Horns left the hospital the next day. Polly walked out on her own two good legs, with Peter Horn following her, looking at her in quiet amaze.

They did not have the baby with them. That would come later. Horn helped his wife into their helicopter and sat beside her. He lifted the ship, whirring, into the warm air.

"You're a wonder," he said.

"Am I?" she said, lighting a cigarette.

"You are. You didn't cry. You didn't do anything."

"He's not so bad, you know," she said. "Once you get to know him. I can even—hold him in my arms. He's warm and he cries and he even needs his triangular diapers." Here she laughed. He noticed a nervous tremor in the laugh, however. "No, I didn't cry, Pete, because that's my baby. Or he will be. He isn't dead, I thank God for that. He's—I don't know how to explain—*still unborn.* I like to think he hasn't been born yet. We're waiting for him to show up. I have confidence in Dr. Wolcott. Haven't you?"

"You're right. You're right." He reached over and held her hand. "You know something? You're a peach."

"I can hold on," she said, sitting there looking ahead as the green country swung under them. "I can wait. As long as I know something good will happen. I won't let it hurt or shock me. The mind is a great thing. If it has some hope, then it's cushioned all around. I'll wait six months," she said. And she looked over the edge of the helicopter. "And then maybe I'll kill myself."

"Polly!"

She looked at him as if he'd just come in. "Pete, I'm sorry. But this sort of thing doesn't happen. Once it's over and the baby is finally 'born' I'll forget it so quick it'll never have occurred. But if the doctor can't help us, then a mind can't take it, a mind can only tell the body to climb out on a roof and jump."

"Things'll be all right," he said, holding to the guide-wheel. "They *have* to be."

She said nothing, but let the cigarette smoke blow out of her mouth in the pounding concussion of the helicopter fan.

Three weeks passed. Every day they flew in to the Institute to visit "Py." For that was the quiet calm name that Polly Horn gave to the blue pyramid that lay on the warm sleeping-table and blinked up at them. Dr. Wolcott was careful to point out that the habits of the "child" were as normal as

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any others; so many hours sleep, so many awake, so much attentiveness, so much boredom, so much food, so much elimination. Polly Horn listened, and her face softened and her eyes warmed.

At the end of the third week, Dr. Wolcott said, "Feel up to taking him home now? You live in the country, don't you? All right, you have an enclosed patio, he can be out there in the sunlight, on occasion. He needs a mother's love. That's trite, but nevertheless true. He should be suckled. We have an arrangement where he's been fed by the new feed-mech; cooing voice, warmth, hands, and all." Dr. Wolcott's voice was dry, "But still I feel you are familiar enough with him now to know he's a pretty healthy child. Are you game, Mrs. Horn?"

"Yes, I'm game."

"Good. Bring him in every third day for a check up. Here's his formula. We're working on several ideas now, Mrs. Horn. We should have some results for you by the end of the year. I don't want to say anything definite, but I have reason to believe we'll pull that boy right out of the fourth dimension, like a rabbit out of a hat."

The doctor was mildly surprised and pleased when Polly Horn kissed him, then and there.

PETE HORN took the 'copter home over the smooth rolling greens of Griffith. From time to time he looked at the pyramid lying in Polly's arms. She was making cooing noises at it, it was replying in approximately the same way.

"I wonder," said Polly.

"What?"

"How do *we* look to it?" asked his wife.

"I asked Wolcott about that. He said we probably look funny to him, also. He's in one dimension we're in another."

"You mean we don't look like men and women to him?"

"If we could see ourselves, no. But, remember, the baby knows nothing of men or women. To the baby whatever shape we're in, we are natural. It's accustomed to seeing us shaped like cubes or squares or pyramids, as it sees us from its separate dimension. The baby's had no other experience, no other norm with which to compare what it sees. We *are* its norm. On the other hand, the baby seems weird to us because we compare it to our accustomed shapes and sizes."

"Yes, I see. I see."

Baby was conscious of movement. One White Cube held him in warm appendages. Another White Cube sat further over, within an oblong of purple. The oblong moved in the air over a vast bright plain of pyramids, hexagons, oblongs, pillars, bubbles and multi-colored cubes.

One White Cube made a whistling noise. The other White Cube replied with a whistling. The White Cube that held him shifted about. Baby watched the two White Cubes, and watched the fleeing world outside the traveling bubble.

Baby felt—sleepy. Baby closed his eyes, settled his pyramidal youngness upon the lap of the White Cube, and made faint little noises. . . .

"He's asleep," said Polly Horn.

* * * * *

Summer came. Peter Horn himself was busy with his export, import business. But he made certain he was home every night. Polly was all right during the day, but, at night, when she had to be alone with the child, she got to smoking too much, and one night he found her passed out on the davenport, an empty sherry bottle on the table beside her. From then on, he took care of the child himself, nights. When it cried it made a weird whistling noise, like some jungle animal lost and wailing. It wasn't the sound of a baby.

Peter Horn had the nursery sound-proofed.

"So your wife won't hear your baby crying?" asked the workman.

"Yeah," said Pete Horn. "So she won't hear."

They had few visitors. They were afraid that by some accident or other someone might stumble on Py, dear sweet pyramidal little Py.

"What's that noise?" asked a visitor one evening, over his cocktail. "Sounds like some sort of bird. You didn't tell me you had an aviary, Peter?"

"Oh, yes," said Horn, going and closing the nursery door. "Have another drink. Let's get drunk, everybody."

It was like having a dog or a cat in the house. At least that's how Polly looked upon it. Pete Horn watched her and observed exactly how she talked and petted the small Py. It was Py this and Py that, but somehow with some reserve, and sometimes she would look around the room and

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touch herself, and her hands would clench, and she would look lost and afraid, as if she were waiting for someone to arrive.

In September, Polly reported to Pete: "He can say Daddy. Yes he can. Come on, Py. Say, Daddy!"

SHE held the blue warm pyramid up. "Wheelly," whistled the little warm blue pyramid.

"Daddy," repeated Polly.

"Wheelly!" whistled the pyramid.

"For heaven's sake, cut it out!" shouted Pete Horn. He took the child from her and put it in the nursery where it whistled over and over that name, that name, that name. Whistled, whistled. Horn came out and got himself a stiff drink. Polly was laughing quietly, bitterly.

"Isn't that terrific?" she said. "Even his *voice* is in the fourth dimension. I teach him to say Daddy and it comes out Wheelly! He says Daddy, but it sounds like Wheelly to *us!*" She looked at her husband. "Won't it be nice when he learns to talk later? We'll give him Hamlet's soliloquy to memorize and he'll say it but it'll come out, "Wheelly-roth urll whee whistle wheet!" She mashed out her cigarette. "The offspring of James Joyce! Aren't we lucky?" She got up. "Give me a drink."

"You've had enough," he said.

"Thanks, I'll help myself," she said, and did.

October, and then November. Py was learning to talk now. He whistled and squealed and made a bell-like tone when he was hungry. Dr. Wolcott visited. "When his color is a constant bright blue," said the doctor. "That means he's healthy. When the color fades, dull—the child is feeling poorly. Remember that."

"Oh, yes, I will, I will," said Polly. "Robin's egg blue for health. Dull cobalt for illness."

"Young lady," said Wolcott. "You'd better take a couple of these pills and come see me tomorrow for a little chat. I don't like the way you're talking. Stick out your tongue. Ah-hmm. Give me your wrist. Pulse bad. Your eyes, now. Have you been drinking? Look at the stains on your fingers. Cut the cigarettes in half. I'll see you tomorrow."

"You don't give me much to go on," said Polly. "It's been almost a year now."

"My dear Mrs. Horn, I don't want to excite you continually. When we have our mechs ready we'll let you know. We're working every day. There'll be an experiment soon. Take those pills now and shut that nice mouth." He chucked Py under the "chin." "Good healthy baby, by gravy! Twenty pounds if he's an *ounce!*"

Baby was conscious of the goings and comings of the Two White Cubes. The two nice White Cubes who were with him during all of his waking hours. There was another Cube, a Gray One, who visited on certain days. But mostly it was the Two White Cubes who cared for and loved him. He looked up at the one warm, rounder, softer White Cube and made the low warmbling soft sound of contentment. The White Cube fed him. He was content. He grew. All was familiar and good.

The New Year, the year 1969, arrived.

Rocket ships flashed on the sky, and helicopters whirred and flourished the warm California winds.

Peter Horn carted home large plates of specially poured blue and gray polarized glass, secretly. Through these, he peered at his "child." Nothing doing. The pyramid remained a pyramid, no matter if he viewed it through X-ray or yellow cellophane. The barrier was unbreakable. Horn returned quietly to his drinking.

The big thing happened early in February. Horn, arriving home in his helicopter, was appalled to see a crowd of neighbors gathered on the lawn of his home. Some of them were sitting, others were standing, still others were moving away, with frightened expressions on their faces.

Polly was walking the "child" in the yard.

Polly was quite drunk. She held the small blue pyramid by the hand and walked him up and down. She did not see the helicopter land, nor did she pay much attention as Horn came running up.

One of the neighbors turned. "Oh, Mr. Horn, it's the cutest thing. Where'd you *find* it?"

One of the others cried, "Hey, you're quite the traveler, Horn. Pick it up in South America."

POLLY held the pyramid up. "Say Daddy!" she cried, trying to focus on her husband.

"Wheellly!" cried the pyramid.

"Polly!" shouted Peter Horn, and strode forward.

"He's friendly as a dog or a cat," said Polly staggering along, taking the child with

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her. She laughed at the neighbors. "Oh, no, he's not dangerous. He looks dangerous, yes, but he's not. He's friendly as a baby. My husband brought him from Afghanistan the other day. Has anybody got a drink?"

The neighbors began to move off when Peter Horn glared at them.

"Come back!" Polly waved at them. "Come back! Don't you want to see my baby? *Don't* you? Yes, he's my *child*, my very *own!* Isn't he simply beautiful!"

He slapped her face.

"My baby," she said, brokenly.

He slapped he again and again until she quit saying it and collapsed. He picked her up and took her into the house. Then he came out and took Py in and then he sat down and phoned the Institute.

"Dr. Wolcott. This is Horn. You'd better get your stuff ready for the experiment. It's tonight or not at all."

There was a hesitation. Finally, Wolcott sighed. "All right. Bring your wife and the child. We'll try to have things in shape."

They hung up.

Horn sat there studying the pyramid.

"The neighbors thought he was the cutest pet," said his wife, lying on the couch, her eyes shut, her lips trembling. . . .

The Institute hall smelled clean, neat, sterile. Dr. Wolcott walked along it, followed by Peter Horn and his wife Polly, who was holding Py in her arms. They turned in at a doorway and stood in a large room. In the center of the room were two tables with large black hoods suspended over them. Behind the tables were a number of machines with dials and levers on them. There was the faintest perceptible hum in the room. Pete Horn looked at Polly for a moment.

Wolcott gave her a glass of liquid. "Drink this." She drank it. "Now. Sit down." They both sat. The doctor put his hands together and looked at them for a moment.

"I want to tell you what I've been doing in the last few months," he said. "I've tried to bring the baby out of the dimension, fourth, fifth, or sixth, that it is in. I haven't said much to you about it, but every time you left the baby for a checkup we worked on the problem. Now, do not get excited, but, I think we have found a way out of our problem."

Polly looked up quickly, her eyes lighting. "What!"

"Now, now, wait a moment," Wolcott cautioned her. "I have a solution, but it has nothing to do with bringing the *baby* out of the dimension in which *it* exists."

Polly sank back. Horn simply watched the doctor carefully for anything he might say. Wolcott leaned forward.

"I can't bring Py out, but I can put you people *in*. That's it." He spread his hands.

Horn looked at the machine in the corner. "You mean you can send *us* into Py's dimension?"

"If you want to go badly enough."

"I don't know," said Horn. "There'll have to be more explained. We'll have to know what we're getting into."

Polly said nothing. She held Py quietly and looked at him.

Dr. Wolcott explained. "We know what series of accidents, mechanical and electrical, forced Py into his present state. We can reproduce those accidents and stresses. But bringing him *back* is something else. It might take a million trials and failures before we got the combination. The combination that jammed him into another space was an accident, but luckily we saw, observed and recorded it. There are no records for bringing one back. We have to work in the dark. Therefore, it will be easier to put *you* in the fourth dimension than to bring Py into ours."

POLLY asked, simply and earnestly, "Will I see my baby as he really is, if I go into his dimension?"

Wolcott nodded.

Polly said, "Then, I want to go." She was smiling weakly.

"Hold on," said Peter Horn. "We've only been in this office five minutes and already you're promising away the rest of your life."

"I'll be with my real baby, I won't care."

"Dr. Wolcott, what will it be like, in that dimension on the other side?"

"There will be no change that *you* will notice. You will both seem the same size and shape to one another. The pyramid will become a baby, however. You will have added an extra sense, you will be able to interpret what you see differently."

"But won't we turn into oblongs or pyramids ourselves? And won't you, doctor, look like some geometrical form instead of a human?"

"Does a blind man who sees for the first time give up his ability to hear or taste?" asked the doctor.

"No."

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"All right, then. Stop thinking in terms of substraction. Think in terms of addition. You're gaining something. You lose nothing. You know what a human looks like, which is an advantage Py doesn't have, looking out from his dimension. When you arrive 'over there' you can see Dr. Wolcott as *both* things, a geometrical abstract or a human, as you choose. It will probably make quite a philosopher out of you. There's one other thing, however."

"And that?"

"To everyone else in the world you, your wife and the child will look like *abstract forms*. The baby a triangle. Your wife an oblong perhaps. Yourself a hexagonal solid. The *world* will be shocked, not you."

"We'll be freaks."

"You'll be freaks," said Wolcott. "But you won't know it. You'll have to lead a secluded life."

"Until you find a way to bring all three of us out together."

"That's right. Until then. It may be ten years, twenty. I won't recommend it to you, you may both develop psychoses as a result of feeling apart, different. If there's anything paranoid in you, it'll come out. It's up to you, naturally."

Peter Horn looked at his wife, she looked back gravely.

"We'll go," said Peter Horn.

"Into Py's dimension?" said Wolcott.

"Into Py's dimension," said Peter Horn, quietly.

They stood up from their chairs. "We'll lose no other sense, you're certain, doctor? Hearing or talking. Will you be able to understand us when we talk to you? Py's talk is incomprehensible, just whistles."

"Py talks that way because that's what he thinks we sound like when our talk comes through the dimensions to him. He imitates the sound. When you are over there and talk to me, you'll be talking perfect English, because you know *how*. Dimensions have to do with senses and time and knowledge. Don't worry about that."

"And what about Py? When we come into his strata of existence. Will he see us as humans, immediately, and won't that be a shock to him? Won't it be dangerous."

"He's awfully young. Things haven't got too set for him. There'll be a slight shock, but your odors will be the same, and your voices will have the same timber and pitch and you'll be just as warm and loving, which is most important of all. You'll get on with him well.",

Horn scratched his head slowly. "This seems such a long way around to where we want to go." He sighed. "I wish we could have another kid and forget all about this one."

"This baby is the one that counts. I dare say Polly here wouldn't want any other, would you, Polly? Besides, she *can't* have another. I didn't say anything before, but her first was her *last*. It's either *this* baby or none at all."

"This baby, *this* baby," said Polly.

WOLCOTT gave Peter Horn a meaningful look. Horn interpreted it correctly. This baby or no more Polly ever again. This baby or Polly would be in a quiet room somewhere staring into space for the rest of her life, quite insane. Polly took this whole thing as a personal failure of her own. Somehow she supposed *she* herself had forced the child into an alien dimension. She lived only to make right that wrong, to lose the sense of failure, fear and guilt. It had to be Py. It just simply *had* to be Py. You couldn't reason Polly out of it. There was the evidence, the pyramid, to prove her guilt. It had to be Py.

They walked toward the machine together. "I guess I can take it, if she can," said Horn, taking her hand. "I've worked hard for a good many years now, it might be fun retiring and being an abstract for a change."

"I envy you the journey, to be honest with you," said Wolcott, making adjustments on the large dark machine. "I don't mind telling you that as a result of your being 'over there' you may very well write a volume of philosophy that will set Dewey, Bergson, Hegel or any of the others on their ears. I might 'come over' to visit you one day."

"You'll be welcome. What do we need for the trip?"

"Nothing. Just lie on these tables and be still."

A humming filled the room. A sound of power and energy and warmth.

They lay on the tables, holding hands, Polly and Peter Horn. A double black hood came down over them. They were both in darkness. From somewhere far off in the hospital, a voice-clock sang, "Tick tock, seven o'clock. Tick tock, seven o'clock . . ." fading away in a little soft gong.

The low humming grew louder. The ma-

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chine glittered with hidden, shifting, compressed power.

"Will we be killed, is there any chance of that?" cried Peter Horn.

"No, none!"

The power screamed! The very atoms of the room divided against each other, into alien and enemy camps. The two sides fought for supremacy. Horn opened his mouth to shout as he felt his insides becoming pyramidal, oblong with the terrific electrical wrestlings in the air. He felt a pulling, sucking, demanding power clawing at his body. Wolcott was on the right track, by heavens! The power yearned and nuzzled and pressed through the room. The dimensions of the black hood over his body were stretched, pulled into wild planes of incomprehension. Sweat, pouring down Horn's face, seemed more than sweat; it seemed a dimensional essence!

He felt his body webbed into a dimensional vortex, wrenched, flung, jabbed, suddenly caught and heated so it seemed to melt like running wax.

A clicking sliding noise.

Horn thought swiftly, but calmly. How will it be in the future with Polly and I and Py at home and people coming over for a cocktail party? How will it be?

Suddenly he knew how it would be and the thought of it filled him with a great awe and a sense of credulous faith and time. They would live in the same white house on the same quiet green hill, with a high fence around it to keep out the merely curious. And Dr. Wolcott would come to visit, park his beetle in the yard below, come up the steps and at the door would be a tall slim White Rectangle to meet him with a dry martini in its snake-like hand.

And in an easy chair across the room would sit a Salt White Oblong seated with a copy of Nietzsche open, reading, smoking a pipe. And on the floor would be Py, running about. And there would be talk and more friends would come in and the White Oblong and the White Rectangle would laugh and joke and offer little finger sandwiches and more drinks and it would be a good evening of talk and laughter.

That's how it would be.

—*Click.*

The humming noise stopped.

The hood lifted from Horn.

It was all over.

They were in another dimension.

He heard Polly cry out. There was much light. Then he slipped from the table, stood blinking. Polly was running. She stooped and picked up something from the floor.

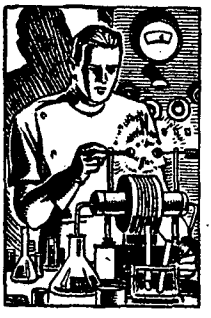
It was Peter Horn's son. A living, pink-faced, blue-eyed boy, lying in her arms, gasping and blinking and crying.

The pyramidal shape was gone. Polly was crying with happiness.

Peter Horn walked across the room, trembling, trying to smile himself, to hold on to Polly and the boy baby, both at the same time, and cry with them.

"Well!" said Wolcott, standing back. He did not move for a long while. He only watched the White Oblong and the White slim Rectangle holding the Blue Pyramid on the opposite side of the room. An assistant came in the door.

"*Shh,*" said Wolcott, hand to his lips. "They'll want to be alone awhile. Come along." He took the assistant by the arm and tiptoed across the room. The White Rectangle and the White Oblong didn't even look up when the door closed.



In four generations under the rule of the Scientists there was no longer any war, any want, any disease, any fear—but rebellion stirred in THE FACELESS MEN, next issue's amazing complete novel by Arthur Leo Zagat!

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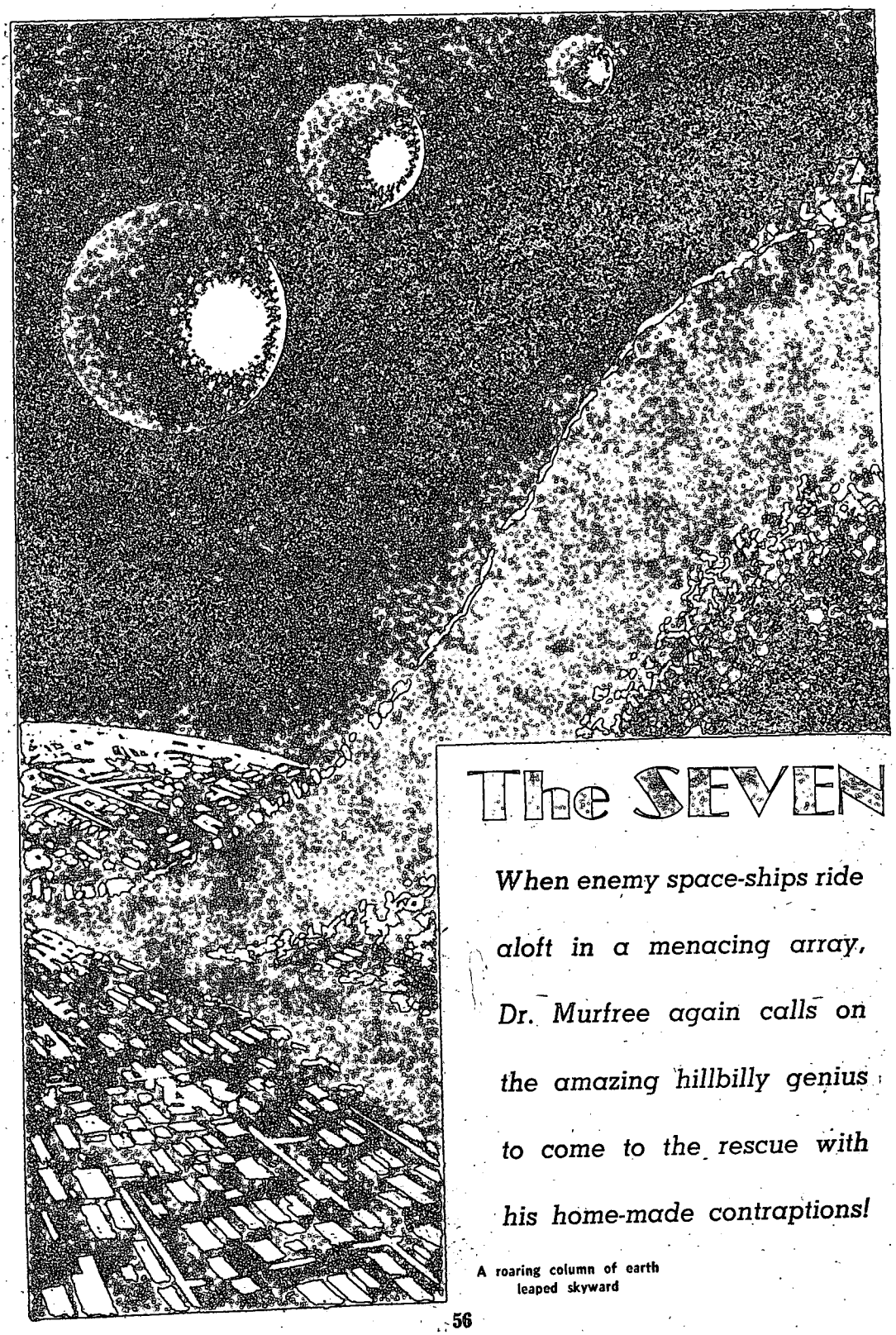

The SEVEN

When enemy space-ships ride aloft in a menacing array, Dr. Murfree again calls on the amazing hillbilly genius to come to the rescue with his home-made contraptions!

A roaring column of earth leaped skyward

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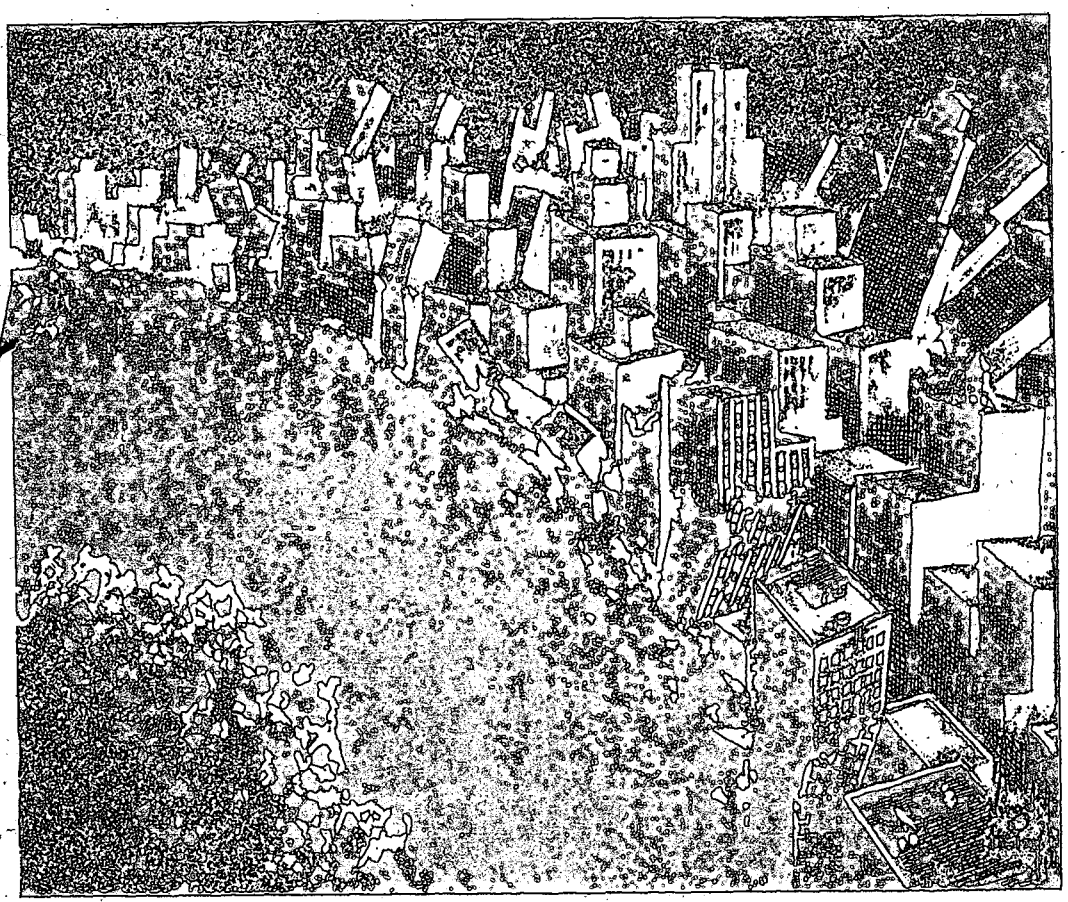

TEMPORARY MOONS

CHAPTER I

Trouble in the Sky

THE U. S. Signal Corps announced the discovery of a new satellite of Earth in the latter part of July, and newspapers everywhere broke out in a rash of pseudo-scientific comment. The new satellite had been picked up by Signal Corps radars, in the course of experiments to work out a technic for detecting guided missiles at extreme range, while they were still rising in their high-arched flight beyond the atmosphere. The radars picked up indications of an object of appreciable size at a distance of four thousand miles, which—the moon-echo aside—was a record for radar detection.

Immediately the observation was made it was repeated, and repeated again and again, for verification. When the confirmatory fixes were computed, a course and speed for the unseen object proved it to have exact orbital speed and direction. It was circling the earth between three and four thousand miles up, and made a complete circuit of the globe in 2 hours, 15 minutes, 32 seconds.

On the same day this discovery was released to the newspapers, Dr. David Murfree—formerly of the Bureau of Standards—

A Bud Gregory Novelet by WILLIAM FITZGERALD

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mailed a check to Bud Gregory on the shores of Puget Sound. Also on the same day he received the papers of incorporation of a company, to be called Ocean Products, Inc. He was in the peculiar position of having to get rich on Bud Gregory's brains because Bud wouldn't, and somebody had to. That same day, while Murfree was busy on the Atlantic Coast, Bud Gregory went fishing with two of his tow-headed children on the other side of the continent.

Two weeks later—in the early part of August—a second new satellite of Earth was discovered. It was closer to Earth than the first—barely 1500 miles up—and it made a circuit in 40 minutes 14 seconds. The first and farther new satellite was under continuous radar observation, now, and the fact that it was a tiny moon of Earth was completely verified, though it had not been sighted by any telescope. This newer, second satellite, of course, moved much too fast for any astronomer to hope to pick it up either visually or on a photographic plate.

ON THE day of the second satellite's announcement, Murfree assigned half the stock in Ocean Products, Inc., to a trust-fund for Bud Gregory and his family. That day, Bud Gregory stayed home and dozed beside a portable radio. It was raining too hard for him to go fishing.

The third and fourth new satellites—periods of 1 hr. 19 min., 12 sec., and 3 hr. 5 min., 42 sec. respectively—were discovered only two days apart. The fifth was found two days later, and the sixth and seventh were spotted within an hour of each other, when they were in conjunction and only five hundred miles apart, 7500 and 8000 miles up.

Murfree was very busy around this time. He had a gadget that Bud Gregory had made, and it couldn't be patented, and it couldn't be talked about, but it needed to be used. So he was getting Ocean Products, Inc., a mail address in New York and a stretch of ocean frontage on the Maryland coastline. He was having painful conferences with high-priced lawyers—whose point of view was as remote from that of a scientist as possible—and with low-priced electrical-installation men. He was run ragged. But Bud Gregory was sitting in the sun out on the Pacific coast, in blissful somnolence and doing nothing whatever.

Nobody suspected anything menacing in the existence of seven hitherto unsuspected and still invisible moons. Popular songs were written about them, radio programs exhaustively exploited them for gags, they were worked into three comic strips, and they headed for oblivion. But they did not reach it. When first danger was traced to them, Murfree did not hear about it for a time because he was painstakingly setting up Ocean Products, Inc., as a going concern which would pay taxes and comply with all laws, and give out no information about its dealings to anybody. Bud Gregory was living a life of placid, unambitious uselessness.

The first indication that the moons might be other than merely captured meteorites came when a graph appeared in an astronomical journal, tracing their orbits. Their orbits were at very odd angles, not at all near the plane of the ecliptic. They criss-crossed and overlapped, and at least one of them passed very nearly overhead above every spot of the earth's surface every twenty-four hours. The arrangement was too perfect and too exact to be chance. It was design. The moons were not meteorites following paths dictated by the circumstances of their capture. They were artificial objects, doubtless blackened so they could not be seen against black space, traveling on courses which allowed them to survey and perhaps to threaten every spot on earth every day.

The scientific article which pointed out these facts suggested that they might be guided missiles sent up from earth and expending no power while they waited for the commands which would send them hurtling down upon a chosen target. Or they might not be earthly, but space-ships.

They might even be a fleet of exploring vessels from the planet of some other sun, which did not make contact with humanity but observed in preparation for purposes which could only be guessed at. Everybody guessed it to be conquest at the least.

Panic welled up among the people of the earth. If a space-fleet of some alien race had grim designs upon Earth, the danger was great. But if men had made the ships and sent them secretly up into the heavens, they meant more than danger. They meant doom. And whether their crews were men or monstrous creatures from beyond the abyss of interstellar space, their existence and silent menace produced terror and panic and—men being what they are—fury amounting almost to despair.

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Murfree was busy. Very busy. But he realized that the danger of the seven invisible space-things was more important than any of his private affairs, and he knew the only man on earth who might be able to do something about that danger. He boarded a plane for the West Coast to see Bud Gregory.

Two nights later Murfree drove cautiously down a winding narrow road through fog. His headlights cast a golden glow into the dense white pall of a Puget Sound fog-bank, and the fog gathered up the light and threw it back. Murfree drove at the barest of crawls. He could see the edge of the road on either side, and the mist-wetted trunks of second-growth trees, but it would be very difficult indeed to pick out the beginning of that disused logging-road which led to Bud's shack.

BUD GREGORY was, of course, something so extraordinary that nobody ever felt the need for a word to describe him, and he lived in a tumbledown shack somewhere in this cut-over land. It was easy to miss the way at the best of times. At night, and in such a densely obscuring fog, it would be difficult indeed to find it. Murfree slowed the car until it barely moved, straining his eyes for a sign of the turn-off.

His relationship to Bud Gregory was at least peculiar. Murfree had been a physicist in the Bureau of Standards when a monstrous atom-pile started up—seemingly of itself—in the Great Smoky Mountains. Murfree alone had realized the nature of the phenomenon and set out to track it down. In tracking it, he'd come upon Bud Gregory, who had an incredible facility for making things that the physicists of the world could not yet imagine, not without knowledge of physical laws they expected or hoped to learn in a hundred years or so.

Bud Gregory was unwittingly responsible for the atomic pile, and Murfree got him to stop it.* But Bud fled, afterward, in terror of sheriffs—and work. He was almost illiterate and utterly without ambition, but he had an intuitive knowledge of how to make things that nobody else could understand.

Murfree, now, had a device which was the stock-in-trade of Ocean Products, Inc. He didn't understand it. He didn't hope to. It was beyond him—as far beyond him as, say, the mental processes of a mathematical prodigy who extracts fourth-power roots in his head. But he did know that despite Bud Gregory's violent aversion to work of any sort, he was the only man on earth who could cope with the sort of menace the seven new moons of Earth constituted. So he'd flown across the continent to beg, persuade, or bully Bud into action.

Bud was drawing ten dollars a day from Murfree for doing nothing, right now. It was the height of his earthly ambition to sit in the sun, drink beer, eat hog-meat, not bother anybody and have nobody bother him, and not have to worry about work. So Murfree had some faint hope of influencing him.

Right now he thought he saw an opening in the woods to the left. He could not be sure, but he stopped the car and got out to see. The radiance of his car's headlights in the mist enabled him to be certain. It was the beginning of a no-longer-used trail into the second-growth, not merely a gap in the young trees. There were no recent automobile-tracks, but Bud no longer had a car.

Bud once had one, bought for twenty-five dollars and which he'd impossibly caused to bring his family across the continent. His son Tom had wrecked it some months past. Evidently, he hadn't found another sufficiently dilapidated to suit him.

Murfree turned to go back to his car. Then he heard a plaintive noise overhead. Instinctive cold chills ran down his back. A child's voice came from mid-air over his head.

"Mistuh! We're lost!"

Murfree froze. There was a slight scuffling sound. Straight up in the air over the treetops. A voice hissed in empty air toward the stars.

"Shut up! You want him to tell Pa?"

There was no sound of a motor up aloft. There was no sound anywhere except his own motor's murmurous purring and the dripping of condensed fog from the trees. There could be no flying craft overhead. Not possibly!

The child's voice wailed, up above the tree-tops.

"B-but I w-want to go home!"

The other, angry voice, a boy's voice, spoke again. It was halfway but no nearer to the voice of a man. It was hushed and threatening.

"Air you a-goin' to hush your mouth?"

*See *"The Gregory Circle,"* THRILLING WONDER STORIES, April, 1947.

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Then, suddenly, Murfree's heart beat again. Scientist or no, he had felt unreasoning, superstitious terror at the wailing of a child in the night and fog above the treetops. But the phrasing of that angry boy's voice was familiar. It was not local phrasing or accent. It was Smoky Mountain talk, and Bud Gregory and his tribe of children talked that way.

MURFREE raised his own voice, though it shook a little at the sheer impossibility of the whole affair.

"Up there!" he called. "This is Mr. Murfree! Aren't you Bud Gregory's children?"

A pause. Then the little girl's voice, startled and glad.

"Yes, suh, Mr. Murfree! We were out fishin' and we went to look at Seattle and comin' back we got lost."

Murfree swallowed.

"Where are you, in heaven's name!"

"Right over your head, suh, in our fishin' boat." This was the boy, dubious and uneasy. "We can see your headlights, suh. If you' goin' to see Pa—"

Murfree swallowed again. This was plainly sheer insanity. Two of Bud Gregory's children might very well be in a boat, and fishing, even two hours after sundown. But a boat in which one went fishing should not be floating some forty or fifty feet above treetops at least two miles from the nearest water. Murfree would have credited himself with sudden lunacy, but that he knew Bud Gregory.

"Can you—steer the boat?" he demanded insanely.

"Yes, suh!" That was the boy's voice again.

"I'm right where the road to your house turns off," said Murfree. He was acutely aware of the absurdity of standing in fog on a lonely country road, speaking conversationally to the sky. "I'm going to turn in now. Can you follow my headlights?"

"Yes, suh!"

"Then try it," said Murfree. "I'll stop and call up every so often."

He got back in his car and turned into the woods-road. This was not common-sense, but things connected with Bud Gregory rarely were. Bud Gregory could make things. Once he'd made a device which stopped neutrons cold. Period. That was to get even with somebody who'd threatened to sue him.

Once he'd made a device which turned heat-energy into kinetic energy, to make his rickety car pull up the Rockies in his flight from Murfree's knowledge of his abilities, and Murfree's intention to make him work. Once he'd made a gadget which stopped bullets—and guided missiles—and then threw them unerringly back where they started from.* And he'd made a device which was a sort of tractor-beam which drew to itself selected substances only.

A bit of iron at one end of a curiously-shaped coil made the device draw to itself all iron in the direction in which it was pointed. But a bit of gold in the same place made it draw gold. Lead, or stone or water or glass, anything placed as a sample at one end of the coil made even the most minute distant particle of the same substance move toward it with an irresistible attraction. Murfree was using that device, now, in Ocean Products, Inc.'s Maryland-coast establishment, and Dr. Murfree was getting much more than ten dollars a day out of it.

But nothing that had happened previously gave him quite as queer a sensation as this. He drove into the trail, winding and twisting through the fog and among growing brush and spindling trees.

From time to time he called upward. Each time a voice answered happily from the emptiness overhead.

Something hammered at his mind, telling him that this was the answer to his journey across the continent, but he was a sane man, after all, and this happening was not sane. He almost drove into Bud's house, in his agitation. He braked just in time as peeling, curling clapboards materialized out of the mist ahead. He stopped and sat still, sweating. He heard somebody stirring heavily inside the house before him.

Then he heard a splashing sound off in the mist. Voices. Bud Gregory loomed up in the radiance of the headlights.

"Who's that?" he demanded uneasily. "What you want? Who you lookin' for?"

Murfree got out stiffly. Bud Gregory greeted him with unfeigned warmth and hospitality—because Murfree was paying him ten dollars a day to do nothing. But Murfree was hopelessly uneasy until there were sounds nearby and two children appeared. One was Bud's eight-year-old daughter, and the other was his fifteen-year-

*See *"The Nameless Something,"* THRILLING WONDER STORIES, June, 1947.

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old son. The boy carried a string of fish. He looked distinctly uneasy. The little girl grinned shyly at Murfree.

"Thanks, Mistuh Murfree," she said bashfully. "We was gettin' scared."

Then Murfree swallowed a huge lump in his throat and shook hands with Bud Gregory.

CHAPTER II

A Problem of Inertia

NEXT morning Murfree drove the four miles to the town nearest Bud Gregory's shack. Bud had found an abandoned building on a patch of cut-over land, moved in happily, and thrived while waiting for the owner to put him out. Murfree had made other arrangements. The shack was in an impossibly bad condition, but it suited Bud and his family, and there was only so much that could be done about that. In other matters, though, things were different.

Murfree went after the newspapers, and found the beginning of what he had been afraid of. Radars kept constant watch on the seven newly-discovered satellites of Earth. Some fourteen hours before the newspapers closed their forms, the nearest of the seven had dived down from its normal height of 1500 miles to a bare 500, hardly beyond the thinnest part of the earth's atmosphere.

It went hurtling across the North Atlantic at that height. Then, simultaneously, a Newfoundland-to-Eire transatlantic plane ceased to communicate, and the radars reported that some object was rising from the earth's surface as if to join the nearest satellite. It did not, of course. To have done so would have required an impossible acceleration which would have burned up any earthly object. But the rising object plummeted up beyond the air, wavered, and then rose swiftly again—this according to the radars.

Earth's great telescopes were turned to the position reported, and they saw the missing air-liner. It was then eight hundred miles up and twisting its great aluminum wings crazily as it went straining out into space. A second satellite was almost overhead. That passed on. The liner wavered again, and a third satellite hurtled into line and the upward journey recommenced.

The effect was exactly as if it had been snatched off the earth by the first and flung up for another to catch and draw higher in a ghastly team-work of murder. The passengers and crew of the plane were dead, of course. They could not live even for seconds in the absolute vacuum of space. The plane went wavering up and up, pathetically a tomb for its occupants, until it vanished abruptly some seven thousand miles from Earth, exactly where it would have met the fifth of the seven strange objects in its orbit.

Murfree felt rather sick. He had not expected exactly this, but something on this order. The newspaper accounts were hysterical, but they could offer no explanation. There was still no clue to the origin of the hurtling things in space. They might have come across the void from some distant sun, or they might be the work of men. A nation on earth equipped with such weapons as space-ships and atomic bombs might cherish notions of world conquest. But the fate of Germany and Japan was warning against too great ambition.

The seven objects might have been sent up as targets, as tests of the ability of other countries to combat such threats. If the rest of the world was helpless against them, why, then their makers might unmask themselves and attempt world rule. If they were vulnerable, their origin would remain a mystery.

Murfree drove back with the papers. As he reached the house, Bud Gregory came shambling out, yawning.

"The moons are space-ships, all right," said Murfree grimly.

Bud blinked sleepily. "Moons? What's that you say, suh?"

Murfree held out a glaring headline. "Don't you read the newspapers, man? This is why I came out here to see you!"

Bud took the paper. He sat down at ease on the porch.

"Mostly," he admitted, "I read the funnies, suh."

He read the news-account without great interest. He was the only man on earth—it had seemed—who was capable of figuring out such a thing as a space-ship or a tractor-beam such as had undoubtedly snatched the air-liner out into space. But he was totally undisturbed by the news. He handed the paper back and yawned again.

"Right interestin', suh," he observed.

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"You had breakfast?"

"Listen to me!" commanded Murfree. "About a month ago. . . ."

He told Bud in detail just what had happened up to now—the discovery of the moons and the significance of their orbits. He finished harshly:

"I came out to ask you if you can make some gadgets that will handle those things! Did you have a hand in making them?"

BUD blinked. "No, suh. You been payin' me ten dollars a day to live on. Why sh'd I go to the trouble of workin'?"

Murfree said more grimly still: "I thought so. But they're bad business. This is only the beginning, I suspect. What can you do that will take care of them? What do you need to work with?"

Bud said placidly, "I don't need nothin', Mistuh Gregory. They ain't bothered me. Why sh'd I bother them? I don't figure on workin' myself to death, not when I got ten dollars a day comin' in."

"They came near bothering you!" Murfree told him. "They near got two of your children shot!"

Bud Gregory stared. "How's that, suh?"

Murfree told him curtly about his incredible experience of the night before; of being hailed from mid-air and serving as a guide to two of Bud's children in mid-air in—they said—a fishing-boat. Bud nodded with vexation.

"Oh, that!" he said. "That was our boat, sure 'nough. That boy o' mine, he likes fishin', same as me. But the engine in that boat wasn't no good so I fixed up a drive for it same as I did for my car before it got wrecked. You know, suh, the dinkus I made to make it pull hills."

This was a device that turned heat-energy into kinetic energy and made all the molecules of a block of—say—iron try to move in one direction instead of at random. Bud had made racing-cars on dirt-tracks reach unbelievable speeds, so that he could make two-dollar bets on them.

"And then," Bud added apologetically, "he drove that boat right fast, and her bottom was pretty rotten, so I got scared he'd git her stove in. So I fixed up a—uh—dinkus that kinda lifted her up some. Kinda like a dinkus I gave you, suh, only this one pushes water away, so's it lifts up the boat. I done it because it was easier'n puttin' new planks on. Like to see it, suh?"

"I would," said Murfree, with vast self-control.

Bud called drowsily to his son and gave him orders. The boy reluctantly went down to the boat, tied to a one-plank wharf before the door. An arm of Puget Sound ran into this cut-over land and provided Bud and his family with fishing. The boy climbed into the boat. He pushed off. Then Murfree tensed.

The ancient, unwieldy, tub-shaped craft literally shot out to the middle of the estuary before the shack. It traveled like a bullet, leaving no wake to speak of. What wake there was was only of its keel. The boat itself simply did not touch the water. It had lifted until only its keel-board slithered across the tops of the ripples like a single ice-skate over ice.

Out in the center, the boat turned. Murfree could see clearly. It just barely touched the surface. It accelerated like a crazy thing. It hit eighty miles an hour—and boats do not do that. Then the boy slowed, stopped, and busied himself in the cockpit. Then the launch rose straight up from the water. It lifted smoothly to a height of some forty feet, the height of a four-story building, and stayed there in mid-air. It was unhandy when the boy drove it, aloft. There was no effective rudder. But after a moment or two the boy lowered it to the water and drove it back to the wharf.

"Li'l rascal!" said Gregory, fondly. "I had that fixed so's it wouldn't lift the boat more'n a coupla feet. What's he want to git up that high for?".

Murfree said unsteadily, "Of course that's worth several million dollars. It makes all helicopters and most aeroplanes obsolete."

"Shucks!" said Bud, grinning. "You want me to make some more of 'em! You know me, Mistuh Murfree! I'm settin' pretty right now. I'm drinkin' beer and eatin' hawgmeat and not botherin' nobody and nobody botherin' me. I don't aim to work myself to death. I'm perfectly satisfied just the way I am with just what I got!"

"And I," said Murfree, "am pretty well satisfied with the gadget you've got in that boat. It's part of what's needed, anyhow. I'm going to Seattle to buy some stuff for you to work with. And while I'm gone you might think about this!"

HE PASSED over the rest of the papers. But he pointed to one from Seattle.

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Alone among the newspapers of the United States, the *Seattle Intelligencer* did not feature the carrying-off of an air-liner to space as its lead story. The *Intelligencer* featured a photograph of its down-town section, where above the tall buildings an elongated object hung in mid-air. Murfree had just seen that same object in mid-air, so even the fuzziness of the news-photo did not keep him from recognizing it as Bud Gregory's fishing-boat, floating serenely over a startled and frightened city. And the headlines told the rest:

SPACE-SHIP HOVERS OVER SEATTLE!

Lesser headlines reported:

All U. S. Arms Against Invaders From Space!

And there was a third head:

Anti-Aircraft Guns Arrive Too Late to Open On Invader Over City! Shoot On Sight Is Army Order!

While Bud grew panicky at the danger his children had been in, Murfree drove out the woods-road. He was going shopping for something Bud Gregory could turn into a weapon against the seven ships which circled the earth, in space.

The world armed—quite uselessly. And now that there could be no doubt of the artificial nature of its new satellites, or that they contained crews of highly intelligent beings—quite possibly men—all the world struggled to enter into communication with the mysterious craft.

Short waves, long waves, micro-waves, frequency-modulated waves, amplitude-modulated signals, every conceivable type of radiation signal, was beamed at the small, invisible, hurtling objects as they swung madly about the globe. There was no acknowledgment and no reply. Acres of mirrors were set up, and focussed to make visual signals by reflected sunlight, following first one, then another of the unseen fleet. This, too, was ignored.

And Seattle was not the only city to fancy itself examined by something out of space. Tehran, a village in Shropshire, England, a sizeable city in Czechoslovakia, and Durham, N. C., all firmly reported that they had been inspected at close range by space-craft.

Only Seattle could produce photographs, though, and all from Seattle were fuzzy and indistinct. The reason may have been that certain quite clear pictures which showed a fishing-boat floating in mid-air, with two tow-haired children looking interestedly over the gunwale, were dismissed as obvious fakes.

Then the farthest-out of newly-discovered moons made news. It left its orbit and approached earth. The next-farthest joined it in descent. The two of them then set themselves up in a sort of Trojan system with the fourth of the newcomers to be discovered, all three following the same orbit and seeming to pursue each other round the earth, one-third of the complete circuit apart. They were, then, just 3,500 miles away.

This was proof enough that the space-ships had plans for action of some sort for the future. An impotent and defenseless planet discovered its impotence and defenselessness and waited with the idiotic curiosity of the defenseless to see what would happen.

Murfree came back from Seattle. Bud Gregory dozed contentedly in a chair tilted back against a tree before his door. When Murfree waked him to discuss what was needed, Bud looked uncomfortable but stubborn.

"Mistuh Murfree," he said doggedly, "you're a good friend of mine. I reckon you' the best friend a man ever had. You pay me ten dollars a day, rain or shine, and I'm settin' pretty. I'm satisfied. I don't want no more money. I don't want nothin' excep' what I got. You been mighty good to me, Mr. Murfree, but when you get started talkin' about doin' something about those things up in the sky that nobody ain't even seen yet, you' askin' me to go to a lot of trouble over somethin' that ain't none of my business."

He settled back in his chair, useless and completely contented.

"We're going to need a drive like you've got in the boat, only a lot bigger," said Murfree, "and a lift like you've got in the boat, and some sort of weapon that I guess you'll have to figure out."

"Mr. Murfree," said Bud, amiably, "I like you, and all that, but I ain't goin' to work myself to death for nobody!"

MURFREE regarded him shrewdly. "You sound stake-bound," he said grimly. "You must have some money ahead out of what I'm paying you."

"Yes, suh," agreed Bud. "My wife's savin',

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and the children ketch fish and shoot squirrels an' gather woods-greens. I got almost three hundred dollars cash-money ahead. I don't see no reason to worry about nothin'."

"Those space-ships that snatched the airliner—"

"They ain't bothered me!" said Bud doggedly.

"If they come from another solar system they know we're civilized! They're going to try to find out if we're helpless! Unless they find out we can defend ourselves they may decide to take us over! If they come from somewhere on earth, they're surely trying to find out if the rest of the world can defend itself! And if we don't prove we can, they'll surely try to take over!"

"Mistuh Murfree, I don't bother nobody."

"Listen to me!" said Murfree. "You remember that gadget you gave me?"

Bud blinked and nodded. It was a device of coils and scraps of glass and an iron wire that turned white with frost when it was switched on. A sample of a given substance at one end made it draw similar material in a straight line through the length of its main coil. That device was now the basis of the Ocean Products corporation Murfree had just formed.

There was an elaborate installation on the Maryland coast, with dynamos and electrodes sunk out in the sea offshore, and with much more complicated, closely-guarded apparatus that Murfree had designed to do nothing whatever while looking very busy. But every so often he pointed Bud Gregory's device out to sea and turned it on, in strictest privacy. A morsel of gold, or platinum, or any rare element needed, fitted in place at the small end of its coil. And the device pulled molecules of gold, or platinum, or whatever the controlling sample might be, out of the sea.

It worked like a quite impossible magnetic beam, though instead of iron it attracted whatever its operator chose. It even broke down chemical compounds, as if some sort of electrolysis were at work. And there are at least traces of every known element in the sea:—gold to the extent of one-sixth of a cent in every cubic foot of seawater. A hundred pounds of gold, or thirty of platinum, could be brought to the coffers of Ocean Products, Inc., in any twenty-four hours of operation. And was brought.

"I'm using that gadget," said Murfree, "to pull gold out of sea-water. I'm getting rich with it."

Bud Gregory relaxed.

"That's fine, suh! I'm mighty glad!"

"You're getting rich too," Murfree added casually. "I formed a company and assigned you half of it. I thought your children might like to be rich when they grow up."

"Maybe they will, suh, maybe they will!" agreed Bud. "That's right nice of you!"

"You can draw twenty or fifty or a hundred dollars a day if you like," Murfree added, "and I've bought this shack and twelve hundred acres of land around it and it belongs to you now."

Bud looked alarmed.

"But lookee heah, suh!" he protested. "The sheriff's goin' to come around with a tax-bill—"

"I'm paying the taxes," said Murfree. "Out of your money. I'm handling your money for you. Of course I'll turn it all over to you any time you say." Then he said deliberately, "It's a certain amount of trouble, though, looking after your land taxes and income taxes and state taxes and investments and trust funds and so on."

"You take some of the money for y'trouble, suh," said Bud generously. "Take all y'like, suh, long as I got what I want."

"The pay I want," said Murfree grimly, "is some gadgets. A lift and a drive a lot stronger than the boat has. And some weapons. I want you to make them for me."

Bud grinned.

"Tryin' to make me work, suh? Then just let the money go hang, suh! I got ten dollars a day, and if that stops I got near three hundred I ain't used yet. I don't have to worry!"

WITH a shrug Murfree turned away. "That's what you think," he said drily. "All right! I'm turning your money over to you. All of it. You handle it! I'm through!"

He walked toward his car, and paused to add:

"You'll be arrested within a week," he said casually, "for not filing income-tax forms. There'll be warrants out for you for failing to report state property. You'll be up against it because you're an employer and you've got to keep your social-security records straight and the fees paid. Within two weeks you'll be working night and day paying fixes and clearing up red tape, and you'll go to jail if you don't. Good-by!"

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Bud Gregory started up in alarm.

"Lookee heah, suh! You cain't go off like that!"

"I'm going," Murfree told him. "I'm practically gone. I've made you rich and your children too. If you'd rather go to jail than work yourself to death staying out, it's no business of mine!"

He opened his car-door and stepped inside. But Bud Gregory jumped up and shambled anxiously after him.

"But, Mr. Murfree!" he protested. "Look heah! My gawsh, Mr. Murfree! You cain't do that to me! Uh—uh—if you want some kinda dinkuses, o'course I'll try to make 'em, suh. But don't go off and leave me with all that trouble, suh! Please!"

CHAPTER III

Ruthless Enemies

EITHER the crews of the space-ships were aliens to humanity with no knowledge of mankind, or else they were men and conducting a ruthless war of nerves and an exhaustive test of the ability of the world outside their nation to defend itself. Four days after the seizure of a transatlantic plane, four coaches of the Trans-Siberian Railroad went skyward, accompanied by a tumultuous mass of roadbed and other debris.

Two days later a building in the Georgetown section of Washington, D. C., went screaming heavenward in a shapeless mass of collapsed timbers. Two days later still—there was no warning of it otherwise—radars in the Pacific area noted a rising object. Telescopes caught it some twelve hundred miles out. It was a tramp-steamer, its bottom a rusty red, rising forlornly through nothingness toward some unguessable rendezvous among the stars.

The steamer could not be identified, and it would be weeks before its name could be guessed at by its non-arrival at any port. But unquestionably it had had a crew, and every man was now a frozen, distorted corpse somewhere in its hull. Men, or monsters gratifying scientific curiosity, the crews of the seven space-ships were ruthless.

Waves of panic went over the globe. The loss of life, of course, had been relatively small. It would not yet total a hundred persons. But the blank indifference to human communications and men's total inability to fight back bred terror. Every human being on earth was at the mercy of the unseen things in the skies. And there was not only no way to fight, there was nowhere to flee.

Every spot on earth came under the gaze of at least one of the space-ships at least once each day. There was no single human being who could not be snatched away to strangulation in emptiness at the will of whatever creatures manned the satellite space-ships hurtling round the earth.

It may be that Murfree, who knew what Bud Gregory could do, and Bud himself were the only two people on earth who did not feel a raging and infuriated despair. Murfree made trip after trip to Seattle, frantically urging the completion of the changes he had ordered in an object he'd found and bought with funds of Ocean Products, Inc.

Union rules were complicated. There was a threat of a jurisdictional strike. But he paid time-and-a-half, and double-time, and double-time-and-a-half, and, nearly three weeks after his arrival at Bud's shack, a puffing tug towed a squat, flat barge into the estuary before Bud Gregory's door. Murfree went out in the ultimate of impatience. He paid lavishly. The flatboat was anchored and the tug steamed away. Then Bud went dubiously out to look the creation over.

It was not impressive. Murfree had found a huge watertank in Seattle, intended to store hot water for an industrial installation. It was seven feet in diameter and twenty-odd feet long. He'd had it transformed into a monstrosity.

There was now a one-foot thickness of heat-insulating material covering the outside. There were six protruding ports, with quartz-glass windows, allowing a man inside to look out in every direction. There was a manhole intended to allow the entry of a workman to clean out the tank. It was now closed by an inconvenient small door. There was a sort of wooden floor within. There was more insulation inside. That was all.

"My gawsh, Mr. Murfree!" said Bud. "What' you goin' to do with this thing?"

"You're going to do something with it," Murfree told him. "It's air-tight, its insulated, and it's got windows. Give it a

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space-drive and a way to steer and some weapons to fight with, and it'll be a space-ship. That's what I've got to have!"

"You mean, suh," said Bud incredulously, "you'll go up in this thing?"

"I'm scared green," admitted Murfree, "but somebody's got to go up."

"But—uh—why you? And why sh'd I work myself to death—"

"You're a sensible man, Bud," said Murfree. "You attend to your own business. It's very wise. But it's fools like me, who don't like monkey-business, who keep things going. I don't want to risk my neck. But even less do I want to risk that my daughter might grow up in a world ruled by creatures from outer space with five eyes and eighteen hands. And less still do I want to risk that other men may turn this earth into a tyranny!"

BUD looked unhappily at the bulging object before his door.

"You crazy!" he said vexedly. "They got some trick stuff to use, those fellas."

"Tractor beams, anyhow," Murfree agreed. "That's how they snatch things out into space. How'll you beat that, Bud? And what'll you whip them with? Or are they too much for you?"

"Shucks!" said Bud. "It ain't that!" Then he complained: "But it's goin' to be so doggoned much work! And I figured I wasn't goin' to have to worry about nothin' any more!"

At just the intsant of his complaint, the citizens of Illyria, Mo., went unwarned about their daily business. They knew about the space-ships, to be sure. There had been known cases of persons and things snatched from the surface of the earth and hurled away into the void.

Any place, at any time, might be the scene of another such tragedy. But there were so many places! Actually, the citizens of this small town tended to think of the newspaper and radio accounts of danger as a part of that pageant of entertaining or boring—and sometimes gruesomely thrilling—events that world news is to most people.

It was ten o'clock in the morning. A warm sun beat down upon the tree-shaded streets and trimly clapboarded houses of Illyria. The three-block business district displayed a normal morning's activity. Farm trucks and farm wagons lined the curbs. Pleasantly perspiring citizens moved about. It was a town in which everybody spoke to everybody else, because everybody was acquainted. Horses switched their tails at flies; stout farm women fanned themselves as they shopped; the soda-fountain had its thirsty customers, and two men were loading bags of chick-starter feed into a farm-truck. It was such a placid, somnolent morning as ten thousand others had been.

Then there was a ghastly roaring sound and the edge of the town reared upward toward the sky, exactly as if it had been built upon a gigantic carpet and somebody had picked up one end. Those in the business district looked at the roofs and roads of the northern section of the town, turned up at right angles toward the sky. Then—

Nobody knows, of course, how it felt to the people of Illyria as the ground at once crumbled and rose beneath their feet. Nobody can guess the sensations of the doomed people as a square mile of countryside, including the small and thriving town, went plunging upward as if into an abyss.

A terrible, confused, chaotic mass of houses and earth and trucks and horses and humans and trees and sidewalks shot skyward. It accelerated swiftly. The roaring was drowned out by a shrieking of air as the hundreds of thousands of tons of matter, including nearly eleven hundred human beings, seemed to fall toward the zenith. But the shrieking of wind grew high and far away as the tumbling stuff reached heights where the air was very thin.

As the air grew more and more attenuated, of course the sound grew ever fainter. And presently, when what had been a quiet and orderly and peaceful small town had passed the limits of the atmosphere, when every living thing that breathed or grew was burst or frozen in the pitiless cold of space—then there was no sound at all. Not even grinding noises from the bumping-together of masses of earth and stone, and frozen, once-living things.

Earth prepared to fight, with empty hands. Elaborate plans of defense were suggested, of course. It was proposed to manufacture bombs in vast quantities and so sprinkle the earth with them that any sized objects would prove fatal to a space-ship which approached them. How the bombs were to be detonated was not worked out.

The rocket-missile program of every nation on earth was expanded with convulsive haste. Crank inventors—and impostors—

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arose and clamored throughout the land. At least one individual persuaded a group of patriotic and well-heeled citizens that he had not received a fair hearing in Washington.

He demonstrated a disintegration-ray model most convincingly and received fifty thousand dollars in cash to pay for a full-powered ray-generator which would explode the space-ships even as far away as Luna. Then he vanished overnight to South America with the funds, and his demonstration equipment proved to have caused the alleged explosions by quite normal detonation of small charges of T.N.T. by electric wires.

THERE were organizations formed to overwhelm the space-ships with heat-waves. There were proposals to erect gigantic sun-mirrors ten miles on a side, and frizzle the space-ships in their focuses.

More immediately practical, if equally dubious, were proposals of certain politicians and newspaper owners. They shouted as an act of faith that the space-ships were of human origin, which was quite probable, and that their seizures of unrelated objects and now the destruction of a small town were acts of war, though intended only to terrify the nations later to be subjugated.

When Earth was convinced of its helplessness, the nation responsible would reveal itself as the master of the planet. And the way to defeat this plan was to bomb, now, the nation responsible. Blast it with atomic bombs from one end to the other. Destroy it utterly. Unless, on warning of the world's intention, it surrendered its arsenals and recalled and gave over the secret of its ships. Unfortunately, there was no convincing proof that any particular nation was the guilty one.

Murfree heard these several proposals on the portable radio that Bud Gregory would not allow his son to carry too far away from him. Bud had a placid interest in soap operas. When he began to work on the apparatus for Murfree, the radio was sure to be blaring somewhere in the background. And he worked reluctantly. Murfree watched restlessly.

"If there's anything I can do without understanding it, I'll be glad to!"

Bud turned over the work with alacrity.

"Why, yes, suh! I need another coil just like this heah one. You do the best you can, suh, and if it needs fixin' after, I'll fix it."

He settled back happily while Murfree went urgently to work, duplicating as well as he could the unreasonable curves whose variations from regularity seemed to have a pattern he could not ever quite grasp.

"This here's for the drive, suh," said Bud in deep contentment, tilted back in his chair. "It's right simple, suh. When you put somethin' at the small end of that coil, the dinkus draws other stuff of the same kind along the line that goes out the big end. If you put somethin' at the big end, the dinkus pushes that kinda stuff. Put water at the little end, the dinkus pulls water, put it at the big end, the dinkus pushes against it."

"Like that thing I've got!" Murfree said abruptly. "I make it draw gold and platinum. It's a tractor beam! Like the space-ships!"

"Yeah," said Bud. He yawned. "O'course y'can't make a beam that'll pull anything and everything. You got to push or pull a special kinda somethin'."

Murfree waited, working.

"Suppose," he said after a moment," suppose you put two different things on the same coil, one at each end. Would it pull one and push the other?"

Bud nodded and yawned again.

"O'course, suh. You're doin' that coil right good, suh."

"Listen!" said Murfree sharply. "Suppose I mounted a lot of different things on a disk, and mounted it so I could swing them one at a time into place—would it work?"

He spoke eagerly, urgently. Bud listened, blinking drowsily.

"Sure, suh," he conceded. "That'd work. You go ahead and do it if yuh want to. It'll be all right."

He dozed as Murfree worked more swiftly still. He had the frustrated feeling that comes of doing work one does not understand. He wound these coils, with their scraps of glass here, and their arbitrary other wires at odd angles and with improbable curvatures there. They meant nothing to him. By all he knew of physics the coils would not do anything at all. But he had seen such coils and their working before, and he made them. Because Bud Gregory understood them.

MURFREE worked twelve hours straight for three days in succession before he came to assign more or less arbitrary values to the different parts. He could not see how those values came into

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being at all, any more than a savage who learned to wind an electro-magnet could comprehend lines of force or the meaning of ampere-turns. On the fourth day, a town in Southern Spain was obliterated.

Murfree did not stop at twelve hours' work, then. He kept on, his lips tense, mounting the crude apparatus in place inside the watertank he'd had so absurdly prepared. Bud Gregory yawned and went to bed. Murfree worked all through the night, grim-faced and growing momently more exhausted.

When Bud came out next morning and saw him working stiffly with a welding-torch, he blinked at his guest.

Then he said, "You sure in a hurry to get this dinkus done, suh! Heah! I'll do some for a while. You take a li'l nap."

From Bud, the generosity was extreme. Murfree flung himself down and was instantly asleep, dreaming vague nightmares of continuing to put together devices he did not understand with the constant fear that he was doing them wrongly.

Bud Gregory woke him, shaking him roughly, and Bud's face was scared and drawn.

"Mistuh Murfree, suh!" he panted. "Wake up! The radio says big trouble's loose! Those space-ships, suh, they're killin' folks by thousan's! And they' a-comin' this way, suh! We got to git started!"

A tinny voice came in the manhole of the absurd tank in which Murfree had worked himself into a stupor of fatigue. Bud Gregory's son Tom held the radio close by the opening so that its blaring was audible within.

"—space-ship has been playing tractor-beams slantingly on the countryside as it sweeps on its way. Columns of earth and stone leap upward, miles high, then fall back to earth as the beam is cut off. They're crushing everything they fall on. This ship has already practically wiped out Phoenix, Arizona, and Denver has been hard hit! Every inhabited place is being blasted, either by being jerked skyward to crash down again, or buried under thousands of tons of falling stuff. . . ."

There was a harsh click.

Another voice broke in, "A second space-ship has begun destruction! Its orbit crosses the United States just south of Chicago and passes close to Seattle on the Pacific Coast. It's smashing everything! It will reach the coast in—"

Murfree was dazed, fresh-wakened from sleep to hear of coming disaster. He was stunned, too, by the picture of unlimited destruction turning all the earth into a chaos of tumbled earth and uprooted cities, mankind wiped out save for a few horror-numbed survivors!

The noise of the radio cut off abruptly. The manhole door was closed. Instantly thereafter the unwieldy tank lurched violently. Murfree felt a sensation like that in a swiftly ascending elevator. And, still dazed from his heavy slumber, he saw through a port that the earth dropped swiftly away below.

CHAPTER IV

Struggle in Space

IN THE wildest imagination never was such a space-ship pictured as went wabbling up from before Bud Gregory's shack by Puget Sound. It was shapeless and ungainly. It bulged with its layers of exterior insulation. It had no bow and no stern. It had no streamlined rocket-tubes, no gyros, no neat and efficient instrument-board.

The ship had no control-room or air-lock, there was no space-suit on board and there was literally nothing of the commonly envisioned precision about its design. There was nothing to help in navigation. It was, quite literally, a hot-water tank tumbling and wallowing up toward the sky.

Features on the ground dwindled and were wiped out by increasing distance. The sea seemed to flow beneath, and the mountains to come sliding over the horizon to huddle below. Clouds raced to positions under the wabbling creation. The sky turned darker. It became purple. Then it was black, with savagely gleaming stars, and white-hot crescents of unshielded sunlight smote in the ports and played upon the interior insulation of the space-going water-tank.

Bud Gregory turned his head. He was deathly pale, and sweat stood out on his forehead.

"Mistuh Murfree, suh!" he panted. "You take over! I'm scared!"

He was. Murfree took the controls. He had put together almost all of the weird

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assemblages of wire and bus-bar and improvised sections of glass. He knew how to work the ship, if it was a ship, even if he did not know how the ship worked.

There was the pressor-apparatus acting on water, pushing on all the moisture not only of the sea but held in suspension in the surface earth, and the underground waters also. That would hold the thing away from Earth. It was well beyond atmosphere, now.

Murfree, with a fine determination to be calm, swung another beam into action. Like the pressor-apparatus it worked on water, and also like it, it fanned out. At its striking-point it would pull on water-particles, but it would be so attenuated by its fanning-out that gravity could safely hold all liquid down. The pull would not stir water, but the ship itself. It would pull the craft in the direction of the beam—as long as the beam pointed toward moisture.

The ungainly craft, in fact, could rise to almost any height above earth, and could pull itself around the earth's curvature, but the higher it rose, the less efficient its drive would be. There were, though, other beams that could be used.

There were patched-together assemblages of wires and glass with disks of cardboard at both ends. Turned on, with iron glued to the cardboard disks at the small ends of the coils, they would draw iron and be drawn to it. With the iron at the large end of the coils, they would thrust against iron and be thrust from it.

Rotation of the cardboard disks enabled any of twenty-odd different substances either to draw and be drawn, or to repel and be repelled, and any combination of repulsions and attractions was possible. And at least one beam could be changed from the widest of wide-angle pressor-tractor-action beams to the narrowest of pencil-rays.

"I'm heading east," said Murfree. His voice sounded queer even to himself. He was not prepared for space-navigation save as the constructor of this ship. He could not think grandiosely of a moon-flight, or even of a jaunt to Moon, which was sure and entirely practical. The wallowing water-tank he skippered was now no more than four hundred miles from earth.

"We've got to watch the ground," he said hoarsely. "If that space-ship is still smashing things, there'll be gouts of earth leaping skyward, where its tractor-beams play. Watch out of the ports, but keep out of the sunlight. It'll fry you!"

Bare sunlight would be deadly, yet he headed eastward by the sun. He drove on. There was no vast reach of empty space about him. There was, rather, the monstrous spread of the earth below. It was visibly curved, at this height, but still it was the hugest of imaginable objects.

THERE was silence. Utter stillness. The bright and savage stars above. The misty, slightly curved and soft-seeming earth below. The horizon was a dim haze, a thousand miles and more away.

There was no meaning to distance. The Pacific still seemed almost below, and yet they could see far beyond the Rockies to the Dakota plains. Clouds overlay the earth here and there. A tiny discoloration was a city. A winding string was a river. Anthills were the Rockies themselves.

Then Murfree saw a tiny, tiny, threadlike projection from the earth. It leaned to northward, and it looked like a speck of yellowish lint. Actually, it was a roaring column of earth and stone, leaping ten miles skyward as a space-ship's tractor-beam jerked it toward outer space. Then the beam cut off. Slowly, slowly, slowly, the monstrous column ceased to look like a thread of lint and dissolved into a brownish mist.

It drifted groundward in slow, slow motion—hundreds of thousands of tons of sheer destruction plunging from the sky. It would destroy all that it struck, as well as being itself the destruction of all of which it was composed. But all its motion seemed infinitely deliberate. It would take long minutes for the upflung column to fall upon and destroy the small city it was destined to obliterate. Murfree had to look twice to see.

Then he sighted the line of the column's rise. He swung a tractor-repeller beam to bear.

"There's a space-ship somewhere yonder," he told Bud shakily. "You know these gadgets! See if you can do anything. It's in the beam!"

The device of Bud Gregory's designing quivered suddenly. It was set to attract iron on a wide angle. Somewhere in its range was iron—aloft. Bud Gregory crawled to it, whimpering a little to himself. He was horribly frightened.

"I'd ha' got my fam'ly in this," he said

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despairingly, "only my wife was over to town."

He worked the tractor-pressor beam with trembling fingers.

"Yeah, it's caught onto somethin'," he said between chattering teeth. "I got it pullin' iron and pushin' brass at the same time, now. That'd have to be a space-ship. It wouldn't be no shootin' star, anyways. Now. . . ."

He pushed a control over all the way with his stubby, mechanic's fingers. The beam seemed to strain impossibly.

"It ain't pullin' apart!" said Bud anxiously. "I'm goin' to spin those disks, suh."

He spun the disks which governed what substances were pulled and which were pushed upon by the device. The tractor-beam end of the coil pulled at different metals and assorted other materials, changing the subject of its attractive force a hundred times a second as the disk spun. The pressor-beam end of the device as violently thrust away as many different substances, and changed them as often.

Nothing could stand that! No device ever made by men could take the racking strains created by all its separate parts vibrating wildly, trying fiercely to tear themselves apart. No control-board could work, no relay operate, no system of wire connections remain intact. And—no detonating device could possibly remain unexploded.

There was a sudden, violent, soundless flame. It was not in mid-air but in mid-space, perhaps a hundred miles higher than the wabbling thing in which Murfree and Bug Gregory rode the skies. Something huge and speeding madly blew itself apart with a terrible violence suggesting atomic explosive going off.

"There's one," said Murfree unsteadily. "How'd you do it?"

"I dunno," said Bud as shakily. "I just give it the works."

"There's another ship using a tractor-beam further south," said Murfree, swallowing. "While we're here we'd better—"

"Ow!" Bud Gregory snatched his hand out of a ray of sunlight. Unfiltered by air, it was like the glare of a blast-furnace, only hotter. "Golly! I burnt myself!"

The flying watertank wabbled crazily, and Murfree looked in a new direction. He could see for an incredible distance. But for the haze which blotted out details at the horizon, he felt that he might have seen all of America at once. But there, thrusting upward like needle-points pushed up from below, he saw the spouts which were columns of earth and stone and houses, and human beings.

"Somewhere yonder," said Murfree, rather sick. "Try it, Bud."

BUD GREGORY swung his contraption. He worked it to and fro and up and down.

"*Mmmm*—this heah's got a feel to it," he said pleasedly. "You can tell when somethin's in the beam, suh. I think I got that fella!"

Twin cardboard disks spun on their bearings. Something detonated in space, a thousand miles away. When every separate particle of brass in a complicated mechanism was violently attracted and then violently repelled, and then every particle of aluminum, and iron, and carbon and every other commonly used material was separately subjected to the same process in very fast succession, why something had to happen.

Any fuse would go. Any explosive would be detonated. Any delicately adjusted mechanism would be twisted and bent and jammed and anything which could fire would fire at random. Everything that could happen wrong would do so. And any machine which was loaded with potentialities for the destruction of others would be loaded for itself as well.

Two of earth's seven artificial moons were still-expanding masses of vapor.

Bud Gregory said, "We—uh—we got them, suh! Le's go back!"

Murfree said evenly, "Better not, Bud. It occurs to me that the gadgets they've got are pretty much like yours. Maybe there's another man who thinks like you do—who can make things like your dinkuses. Only he's working for men who want to kill people. You, for instance. Especially you. Maybe he'll be in one of the other five space-ships. Better hunt for them, Bud. We'd both feel safer!"

Bud Gregory searched space beyond the padded walls of the space-going water-tank. It was six feet by twenty, inside, and crammed with utterly unlikely, spidery contraptions of copper wire and glass and oddments.

Everything in it was improvised and everything was inconvenient. Murfree had to bend his shoulders to stand beside the apparatus which kept the tank aloft and

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relatively stable with regard to earth. Bud Gregory sat cross-legged, fumbling with one of his devices.

It took him twenty minutes to find an object which was repelled and attracted alike when the tractor-pressor beam applied to iron and brass and aluminum. It was a space-ship. Bud spun the cardboard disks and its every internal part jerked violently and unpredictably. Murfree saw a tiny pearl of expanding vapor among the stars.

It was half an hour before Bud found another. He spun the cardboard disks. He found two more very readily—and they blew up—but he had to search for over an hour before he located the last. They did not see the last explode, but Bud was sure.

"When the beam's pullin' and pushin' somethin' big and solid," he explained, "it's got a different feel. You can tell when they blow, suh. We go home now, suh?"

Then Murfree agreed to descend. But it had taken a long time to attend to the duties incumbent upon the two-man crew of a flying hot-water tank. The air inside the cramped and crowded space was foul. Murfree knew that his head was heavy, and he found himself panting. He saw Bud Gregory working on something, but he fought to keep his own alertness while he sent the tank down at a slanting glide toward the Pacific coastline. It had never gone much over a thousand miles into space.

"I'm fixin' the air now," said Bud. "You be careful, suh, about landin'. This heah's kinda scarey!"

The air grew fresher. Markedly fresher, though earth was still far away.

"That's right nice," said Bud, well pleased. "The stuff we breathe, suh, it's made outa two kinds of stuff." He referred, of course, to oxygen and nitrogen. "When we breathe, part of the air joins up with somethin' else. Don't it, suh?"

"It does," said Murfree drily.

BUD knew no chemistry. He just knew facts, without knowing how he knew. Oxygen does combine with carbon to form carbon dioxide, which fouls the air.

"I—uh—fixed one o' these dinkusses to pull on the good stuff," said Bud pleasedly, "and push on the—uh—carbon, and it breaks that bad stuff apart. We get the good-breathin' stuff back and the rest is soot, suh. Funny, ain't it?"

"Very," said Murfree.

He was past amazement at anything that Bud Gregory might do. He could make out the outline of Puget Sound and he sent the lumbering space-vehicle toward it in its descent. Suddenly he felt a sudden ironic frustration. Bud Gregory's tractor-pressor beam would extract gold from seawater. That could not be revealed, because it would smash all the world's economy and lead to disaster and starvation as a result of the enrichment of the world's resources.

It would be found that the same tractor-pressor beam would make a space-ship practical. It had made this one, and interplanetary flight would be ludicrously easy. Right now, for instance, a beam sent up to earth's ancient and legitimate moon, could be made to draw even this inconvenient space-craft there, and cushion its landing, and keep the air within it breathable indefinitely. But—

"Bud," said Murfree quietly, "what would happen if you made that gadget draw—say—human flesh or human blood?"

"It'd draw it, suh. Why?"

"And suppose," said Murfree as quietly as before, "at the same time you made it push away—say—human bone?"

"It'd push—" Then Bud Gregory paled. "Migawsh, suh! Anybody you turned it on would come apart!"

"It'd be a death ray," said Murfree savagely. "And it's very possible—it's extremely possible—that the space-ships we just smashed were made by men, and that they got the necessary tricks from somebody whose brain works like yours does, who can make dinkuses that will do anything that's wanted. If so, I hope he was in one of those ships!"

"Yes, suh," said Bud, uneasily.

"Meanwhile, we can't tell anybody," said Murfree grimly. "We humans are able—with your gadgets—to make ships that can travel to the planets or maybe to other stars. With your gadgets we could make the world over, I suspect. But we daren't. Because in giving the world the power to roam among the stars, we'd have to give them the power to slaughter each other by millions. We can't make a space-ship without making a death-ray, Bud. So we can't have space-ships. It's too bad!"

"Yes, suh," agreed Bud, uncomprehending. "It sure is. Uh—ain't that the river that goes in past my shack?"

(Continued on page 112)

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A
Novelet

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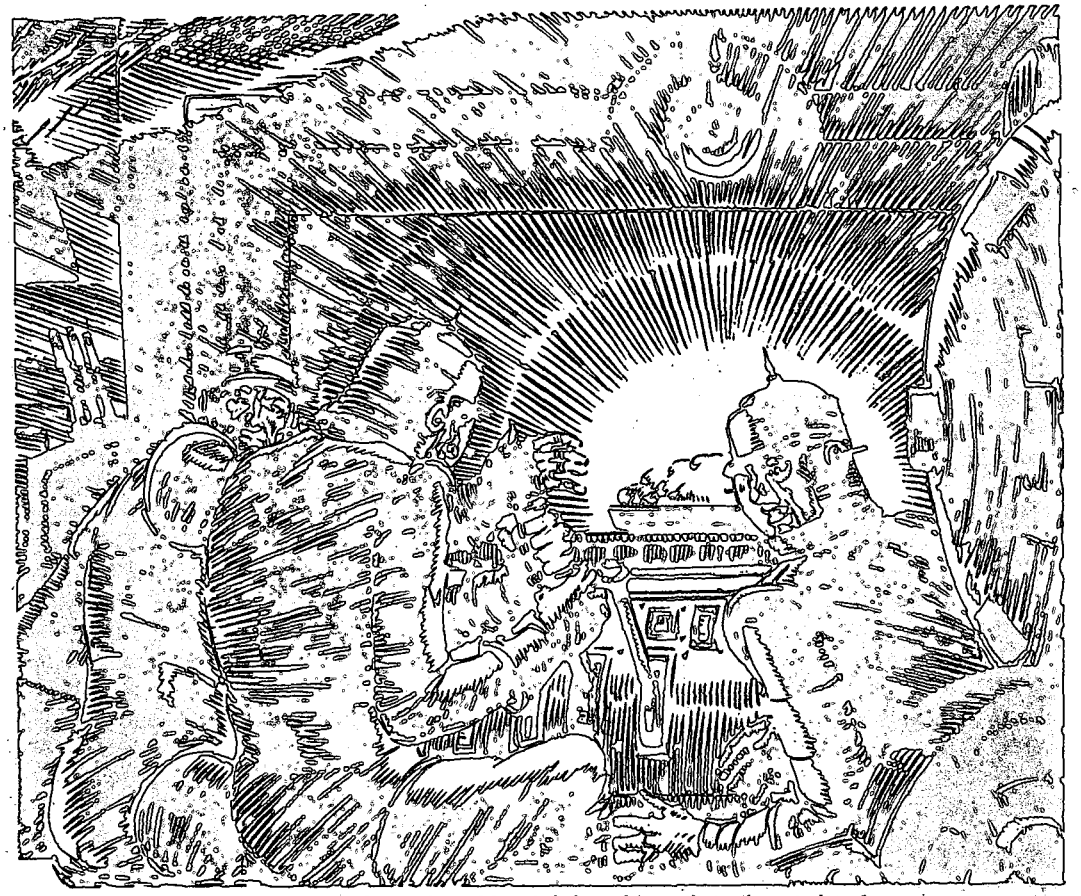

Wonder, delight, all the emotions of its mind changed instantly to alarm, to hurt fear

TRANSURANIC

By EDMOND HAMILTON

Earth's scientists on the Moon create a new life form and then must battle to destroy it—or else face the all-embracing inhumanity of elements beyond control!

CHAPTER I

Unexpected Discovery

IT WAS Andersen's queer talk that marked the beginning of it for us. Of course, that wasn't the real beginning. I suppose you might say it really started when Becquerel first puzzled over his fogged photographic plates. But to us, Andersen's premonitions were the start.

We called him the "Melancholy Dane." But that was just a joke, though his tall, cadaverous appearance fitted it. He wasn't really a gloomy sort, and was a first-class nuclear chemist. That was why he surprised us with what he said at dinner that night.

The talk had been shop talk, of course it

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nearly always was that, at Transuranic Station. Zarias had been triumphant about the way that Element Number 144 was going through the "canyons."

"Fifty new transuranic elements, not counting the gaps!" he exulted. "And I'm sure One-forty-four will be at least semi-stable."

Andersen spoke, then.

"I have a feeling that what we are doing here is against the cosmic scheme," he said in his slow English.

Zarias goggled. He was a fat, bald and irreverent Greek, a brilliant physicist with about as much mysticism as a doorknob.

"Cosmic scheme?" he repeated. "What are you talking about?"

Andersen's sallow face flushed a little as he saw that we were all looking at him curiously.

"I mean," he said hesitantly, "that all these transuranic elements we're creating here are purely man-made. Nothing like them ever existed in the natural cosmos. They're an artificial intrusion, a brand-new order of matter that doesn't rightly belong in our universe at all."

Zarias snorted. "My dear Dane, I'd advise you to consult our friend Varez on the state of your psyche."

I saw that Andersen was a little hurt. "He's only joking, Nils," I put in.

Zarias swore. "I am not joking, Drummond. When a serious scientist starts going mystic, it's time he had his complexes checked."

"Come, come, gentlemen," said Burris, in his mocking way. "We must remember not to get on one another's nerves!"

We all laughed at that, for it was spoken in the Director's pompous manner, and recalled the best joke we had at Transuranic Station. It was a worn-out joke, but still welcome in our isolation and monotony.

Now please don't misunderstand me. I'm not going to strike that "Ah, the loneliness of it all!" pose. The first atomic scientists who served at Transuranic Station pretty well overdid that pose for the benefit of an admiring world. Personally, it always made me sick.

BUT it *was* a lonely environment; there's no getting away from that. Thirty scientists and technicians, twenty-one of them men and nine of them women, doing a six-month stretch in this complex tomb of concrete and metal sunk in the face of the Moon.

When we had first arrived to take over Transuranic Station, we had been solemnly admonished by Cubbison, our Director.

"The most important thing of all," he told us, "is not to get on one another's nerves."

The joke of that was that Cubbison himself was the only man who got on everybody's nerves. Doctor Walter Cubbison—he always insisted on the "Doctor"—was as fine a specimen of scientific bureaucrat as you'd want to see. He had done good research back in the 1950's but that wasn't what had wangled the Commission on Atomic Energy into making him head of Transuranic Station. It was his political ability, we all knew.

"There must be no emotional obstacles to our work," he had adjured us. "All such problems must be submitted to our able psychologist, Doctor Varez."

Well, despite Cubbison's worry over our nerves, we hadn't had to bother Varez yet. We were too well-adjusted a lot for that. But now Nils Andersen seemed to have gone off the deep end, a little.

He had given me something to think about, though. It had never occurred to me that Transuranic Station was an outpost of unprecedented defiance of normality. But in a way, it was.

It's not easy to explain to laymen. It's all very well to write a "Primer of the Atom," but you just can't make nuclear physics as easy to understand as a ball game. But I'll try to explain what Andersen meant.

There were, until the early 1940's, ninety-two elements in nature. They ran from hydrogen up to uranium, from atomic Number One to Ninety-two. Those elements made up everything in nature. Mendelieff had neatly arranged them in his periodic table and there just weren't any more.

Then they got to bombarding uranium with neutrons to create the uranium fission on which atomic energy is based. And they found that one isotope of uranium would absorb a neutron and then eject an electron. That stepped up its atomic number, the number of charges in its nucleus, from ninety-two to ninety-three. And that meant it wasn't uranium any longer but a brand-new element, neptunium.

Neptunium was boosted up naturally by the same process to atomic Number Ninety-four, and so we had plutonium. And then in 1946 the University of California scientists

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started the job of trying to add carbon, Number Six, to uranium, to make another new element—Number Ninety-eight.

You see what had happened? For the first time in history, the "normal" range of ninety-two elements had been extended. New elements, transuranic elements, had been created such as had never appeared at all naturally. They were a totally artificial new kind of matter.

Of course, the atomic physicists didn't stop there. They kept up the boosting process to create more new transuranic elements. By 1960 they had run the transuranic elements clear up to Number One-twenty-eight. Of course, many of them were unstable and could be kept in existence only under special conditions. And after the Cambridge disaster, the Commission got a little nervous about the whole business.

That's why they had established Transuranic Station up here on the Moon where a blow-up wouldn't harm anybody—except scientists. The rocket boys had got to the Moon before 1951 and had found it wasn't good for much else but such a station. So it had been built here on the face of the flat Mare Imbrium.

The "Dome" was what we called the central living quarters. For safety in emergency it had forty-foot walls that could stop any radiation ever heard of. The labs were grouped loosely around it like planets around a sun, connected by sealed underground tunnels. The big atomic piles and separation "canyons" ran off underground, with full remote-control facilities.

The whole place was Earth-conditioned, with magnetized floors that approximated normal gravity when we wore our steel-soled shoes. Even so, men and women couldn't take more than six months of it without organic trouble. We were the second shift of scientists to work at the Station.

WE HAD begun where the first shift left off, at transuranic element Number One-thirty-six. And with Zaries sparking the work, we had run the new elements up to a hundred and forty-four, the last one just being separated now. And it looked as though were now working into a more stable series of elements.

That's why Andersen irked me a little with his talk of these new elements being a challenge to the normal cosmos.

"Everything man does is a challenge like that," I told him next day in his lab. "The first time he smelted iron or sent a radio message, it was the same."

Andersen shook his head. "Not quite the same, Drummond. Iron and electromagnetic vibrations always existed in Nature. We just used them. But these transuranic elements —they *never* existed before."

Before I could argue further, the interphone across his lab squawked in Zarias' voice.

"Drummond! Andersen! Come over here and I'll show you something!"

We went through the tunnels in a hurry, to Main Physics lab. There were already a half-dozen others there—Marie Laurent, Burris, Varez and others.

"Take a look at the panel of Chamber N!" Zarias yelled at us.

The remote controls that handled all the machinery in the "canyons" and buried chambers outside the labs were concentrated on one wall of Main Physics lab. There was a panel of registering gauges and a televisor screen above the controls of each distant chamber.

We looked in the screen first. In Chamber N was a roughly oval mass of tawny metal that was a foot across.

"Element One-forty-four, huh?" I said to Zarias. "You've sure separated a lot of it."

"Look at those radiation gauges!" he yelped. "The gauges, not the screen!"

We looked, and were stunned. The gauges showed that radiation was pouring out *through* the walls of Chamber N.

"Holy cats!" yelled Burris. "Chamber N is leaking radiation like a sieve!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Marie Laurent, blue eyes stunned. "Those walls should hold everything from Alpha to neutrons! Let me check it!"

When she and Burris, our two radiation experts, finished that check, they looked more dazed than before. Marie wiped back a disorderly lock of her heavy dull-blond hair, in a stunned way.

"That radiation from Element One-forty-four is something completely new!" she said incredulously. "It's way down in the forty-fourth minus octave, and it's going through those ray-proof walls like paper!"

Zarias began to swear. He swore in Greek, and he hardly ever did that. I knew then how badly upset he was.

"We've stumbled onto something new, and maybe it's bad and maybe it's good, but it's

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new!" he finished. "A new type of radiation!"

All this time, Andersen had stood behind me staring into the visor of Chamber N in a blank sort of way. In our excitement, we hadn't paid him any attention. But now as we stood dazed and silent, he spoke. He spoke in a queer, halting way, his eyes fixed on the televisor screen.

"We must bring that mass of One-forty-four and a lot of the other transuranic elements out of the chambers, into this lab," he said.

Burris uttered a yelp. "Are you crazy? That new ray might induce enough unpredictable activity in the other elements to trigger a big fission!"

Andersen just looked at him vaguely. "We must do that," he murmured. "It has been born, but It is still weak. We must help It grow stronger, or It will die."

There was a sick silence, then. And in it, all the excitement of our unexpected discovery drained right out of us.

CHAPTER II

An Alien Intrusion

WE KNEW what had happened, all right. It happened to three of the first shift of scientists at Transuranic Station. They had cracked up badly, and that's why we had a psychologist with our shift.

I realized now we should have known it the way Andersen had talked the night before. Of course, he had seemed normal then. But now his dazed, earnest look and halting, crazy talk meant just one thing.

Varez went to him and spoke quietly. "Perhaps you are right, Nils. Will you come and talk it over with me?"

Andersen looked at him earnestly. "You understand, Ramon? It needs strength. We must help It."

"I understand a little," said Varez, taking the Dane's arm. He walked with him toward the door. "I want you to explain it to me."

And then Varez' good work was nearly undone by Doctor Cubbison. He stood in the door, and his high, rasping voice complained.

"Really, Doctor Andersen, I am surprised at your absurd suggestion! I really feel I must report this to the Commission."

"That will be enough," said Varez in his soft voice, and yet there was something in it that shut Cubbison up at once.

But when Varez and Andersen had gone, Cubbison started again.

"This new radiation must be shielded off at once!" he fussed. "See to it immediately, Doctor Laurent! I'll report to New York."

It was like him, that order. It was like him to order Marie to devise instantly a shield for a radiation that no one before had dreamed to exist. But she silently started making capture cross-section tests of various shielding materials, by the remote-control.

By that "evening"—we kept Earth time at the Station—the radiation from Element One-forty-four was still a mystery. It was still leaking out of that chamber, though of course even it couldn't enter the Dome. Marie and Burris had been making their capture cross-sections all day.

Zarias was badly upset, at dinner that night in the Dome. He was upset because this new radiation had suddenly cut the ground from under all the physics he knew so well.

"We're exactly where the Curies and Rutherford were fifty years ago!" he kept saying. "We're on the brink of unexplored territory!"

Marie Laurent was silent at dinner, and afterward I saw her go up the stair to the lookout. I followed and found her gazing out of the filter-windows at the glaring, ghastly desert of the Mare Imbrium over which swung the dull green shield of Earth.

They say that when a man reports for duty at Transuranic Station he spends his whole first day peering raptly from the lookout, and then never goes up there again. It's nearly the truth—the novelty of being on the Moon wears off fast, when nothing out there ever changes.

Marie turned around and smiled at me. "You might have waited long enough to make your coming look casual, Frank."

"Why the devil should I?" I told her. "Everyone in the Station knows how I chase you."

She didn't object when I kissed her. I liked the cool firmness of her lips, and the warm firmness of her body in my arms, and the way her disorderly lock of dull-blond hair fell across her forehead.

She wasn't pretty. Her mouth was too wide and her face had a little too much strength. No, she wasn't pretty—but she was

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beautiful.

She pushed me away. "I'm getting to like that a little too much, Frank."

"I wish you'd take me seriously," I complained.

She laughed. "Be reasonable! I'm twenty-nine years old to your twenty-seven, I'm a very plain girl, and we don't know each other at all. It's just propinquity."

I was annoyed because she always fended me off that way. But before I could argue, we heard a step on the stair. It was Varez who came up into the lookout. He smiled at us in his quiet way. He was a dark, soft-spoken young Costa Rican whom we all liked.

"Just the man I want to see," I said. "I have an emotional problem. It's Marie."

"What can I do about that, Drummond?" he countered.

Marie laughed. "Probably Frank wants you to order me to spend a week-end with him, when we return to Earth."

"You French all have evil minds," I told her. And then asked Varez, "Tell her she has to marry me."

Varez laughed softly. "Transuranic Station is like heaven in only one way—there is no giving in marriage. I can't help you, Drummond."

IT STRUCK me suddenly that he looked tired and depressed.

"What about Nils?" I asked. "Is he all right now?"

"I don't know," murmured the psychologist.

He peered out of the window at the terminator creeping like a tide of darkness across the ghastly lunar plain. In the Earthshine, distant craters fanged the star-specked sky.

"Can you tell us what Andersen meant by his talk in the lab?" Marie asked him soberly.

Varez turned slowly. "It's all rather baffling. He talked at first only of something called 'It'. It had been born and It must grow, It needed strength."

He frowned. "When I tried to probe deeper, I just couldn't get anywhere. I tried hypnosis, but it didn't work. That amazed me, for Andersen seemed a susceptible type. I finally gave him a sedative and left him to sleep."

Marie was silent a moment. "Do you think there could be any connection—"

She was interrupted by feet pounding up the little steel stair. It was Carew, the gangling English youngster who was Zarias' assistant, who burst into the lookout. He looked upset.

"Doctor Varez, I thought I ought to tell you! I just saw Doctor Andersen going into Main Physics lab! Of course it's none of my business, but I heard about what happened today, and he looked so queer and dazed!"

All three of us were startled.

"We'd better get hold of him at once!" exclaimed Varez.

We ran down the stair, and Burris and Mathers, the chief mathematician of the Station, joined us as we hurried across the Dome to the main tunnel into the labs. Burris' face was taut as he ran.

"That cracked idea of his of bringing a lot of the transuranic elements together—if he tried that—"

"This way!" yelled Zarias, his voice from ahead of us sounding strangled. "Hurry!"

We burst into the big Main Physics lab. The first thing we saw was Zarias scrambling to his feet by one wall. His face was deathly white and he had blood on his forehead.

Across the big lab, Andersen was working like a madman with the remote-controls by which the transuranic elements could be mechanically brought from their safety chambers into the lab. The Dane had a blank, unseeing look on his face as he yanked conveyor-switches one after another.

Burris yelled as we ran forward. I heard the clash and grind of gears, and glimpsed lead trays sliding out of their conveyor tubes onto the racks, trays with a dozen different new transuranic elements in them.

The tray with the oval mass of Element One-forty-four in it popped out, as I ran forward. Instantly, that ovoid of tawny metal burst into a shimmering glow of light that seemed to reach toward the other trays.

Zarias shouted thickly behind me. "Stop him before he brings—"

I have to choose my words carefully now. For what happened in the next instant is still not too clear in my memory. There was a sudden feeling of tension in the air. It was the hunch, the sixth sense, that thrills through a radiologist sometimes just before a blow-up.

"Look *out!*" Burris yelled, and I knew from that that he felt it, too.

And then it hit us. I'm not trying to be cryptic about all this. It's just that it was so unearthly it's hard to describe. There was a feeling of tingling force going through my body, and at the same moment something

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jabbed into my mind. I mean that I felt an alien intrusion battering into my thoughts.

I want to be precise. And I know that what I've just written may recall fantasies of alien beings delicately and deftly probing into the human mind. It wasn't like that at all. The nearest I can describe it is this way—if my mind were a complicated watch, what had grabbed it was the uncertain, fumbling hand of a child.

"Frank!" said Marie uncertainly, her face drained of all color. And then she suddenly screamed it. *"Frank!"*

BURRIS was the one who saved us then. He said afterward that he felt that sickening, fumbling mental grasp as we did, but that his first premonition of a blow-up had given him a certain physical momentum that carried him through.

Anyway, he was the one who shoved us toward the door into the corridor. I don't remember much of that moment. I dimly recall seeing Mathers, his ascetic face blank and strange, walking stiffly toward Andersen as the Dane stood working the chamber-controls.

I don't remember any more of it until the moment I found myself out in the corridor with Zarias and Marie and Varez and young Carew, and heard Burris frantically slamming the Main Physics door. The grabbling of impossible fingers on my brain stopped then. I turned around shakily and found young Carew being sick against the corridor wall.

"What *is* it?" cried Marie, her eyes wide with horror. "Something that touched our minds, that radiation—"

Zarias saved us from collapse in that moment, I think. The Greek's black eyes were blazing with scientific passion now.

"Andersen was right—he sensed it from the first!" he cried. "It has been born—a new and undreamed of form of life! Transuranic life!"

"You're mad!" Marie said huskily. "It can only be a queer psychological effect of that new radiation!"

"That new radiation *is* life!" Zarias cried fiercely. "Life of a kind never before existing in the cosmos, because the transuranic elements themselves never existed!" He swept on, as we stood dazed. "What is *our* kind of life? Is it the sulfur, phosphorus, and carbon and other elements of our bodies? You know it is not. There's a spark there, a chemical spark kindled long ago on the primal Earth, that unites those inert elements into a living organism.

"The same way with It. This new radiation from Element One-forty-four is the spark—a spark never existing before in the universe. A spark that has grown with superhuman swiftness now, linking separated transuranic elements together in a strange, loose physical body whose nerves are intangible radiation! A body—and a *mind!* Only a newborn mind yet, but powerful enough already to warp Andersen into helping Its body grow in strength by bringing those elements together! And now—"

Zarias didn't get a chance to finish. Carew, sick and staggering, uttered a thin, high cry.

"It's here again!" His face was ghastly.

My own face must have been, for I felt it, too, at that moment. The fumbling groping of tingling, intangible hands on my brain.

"The Dome!" Zarias shouted thickly. "It's strong enough to reach out of the labs, but the Dome's walls will hold It out!"

CHAPTER III

Clutching Fingers

AS WE stumbled frantically down the corridor, my arm was around Marie. Zarias yanked an alarm signal as he ran, and bells shrilled up and down the corridors. Feet pounded down the lab tunnels, and startled voices called questions.

That general alarm jammed us all at the door of the Dome for a moment. Impossible fingers were fumbling our brains and we were driven by a primitive, unreasoning horror.

Then the ponderous boom of the main door closing punctuated the nightmare experience. I found myself in the little crowd by the door. Nearly everyone in the Station was there, excited and stunned.

Doctor Cubbison appeared on the scene. "What's the reason for the general alarm? Has there been a blow-up?"

Zarias laughed mirthlessly. "There has been a blow-up. A bad one. New life has been born—*new* life. Something alien to our cosmos, something Nature never intended to exist here, but which we clever little people brought into being. Andersen was right last

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night!" His voice rasped higher. "Right now, It's in there in Main Psysics lab! What is It? It's twenty-odd chunks of transuranic elements, formed into an organized body by linking radiation-nerves, by which it can think, feel and *act*. It's only newly born, It doesn't know much yet, but It knows that It wants to grow!"

Cubbison looked impatient. "Really, these dramatics—"

Zarias suddenly relaxed. "You're right. Just dramatics." He looked around. "We're scientists. We have a problem to deal with. And we've got to deal with it quickly before it finishes us."

"What real danger can there be?" Cubbison asked dubiously.

"You didn't feel those fingers of radiation groping at your mind?" Marie asked him.

Burris came stumbling back from across the Dome.

"I've checked the main telltale panel!" he said hoarsely. "All the canyons are going full tilt. Andersen must be operating them!"

Zarias spoke swiftly and coolly now. "The thing has been born and It wants to grow. And It will grow, using Andersen and Mathers and anyone else It can get hold of to create more transuranic elements, form them into a bigger and bigger body, until Its radiation-mind can reach even through the Dome's walls, even maybe to other worlds!"

I felt the full impact of horror, then. I realized that we had set the stage for the birth of a life of radiation and radiating elements that could not share the cosmos with our own kind of life.

"It can grow colossal, but It isn't colossal now," Zarias went on. "It's newborn, fumbling, groping. We have to kill It before It gets bigger."

"But how?" cried Marie. "How can you kill a thing of chemical elements and radiation?"

The Greek set his teeth. "We've got to get back into Main Physics lab and break up Its body by switching those elements back to their chambers. Then we can use the emergency-charges to explode the chambers and so destroy It."

He looked at Marie and Burris. "We'll need shields to keep that radiation off our brains. What will hold it out best?"

"Beryllium, I think," Burris answered. "It seems to be the foot of beryllium in the Dome's walls that's shielding it out now. But you can't make protective helmets of foot-thick beryllium."

"We'll plate anti-red helmets as thickly with beryllium as we can," Zarias retorted, "and take our chances."

Cubbison finally got a chance to speak. He spoke as fussily as though all this were some annoying ordinary accident.

"This is all very upsetting! I shall have to report to New York at once. In the meantime, I leave you in charge of the problem, Doctor Zarias."

He hurried off, and Burris laughed sourly.

"If the universe was about to come to an end, he'd get in a report to New York."

We left Marie to watch the telltales and report to us what Andersen and Mathers were doing in the lab. It was a hideous thing to have in our thoughts as we worked on the helmets—the knowledge that those two were puppets working in the uncanny Thing's grip.

The whole Station was seething with excitement, of course. Everyone swarmed around the improvised workshop where we and the technics sweated to cover three anti-rad helmets with extra-thick layers of beryllium.

EVERYONE knew there had been some kind of a blow-up in Main Physics, but the truth was still too incredible for them. The idea of a new birth of transuranic life, a thing of radiation and unearthly new elements that was a sudden terrible enemy in our midst, was too much for them yet. They thought it was just a crack-up on Andersen's part.

"They may protect us long enough to get at the chamber controls in there," Zarias muttered, eyeing our clumsy helmets when we finished.

Cubbison came stalking back to us as we returned to the lab corridor entrance. His spectacles glittered worriedly at us.

"I've talked to New York and have arranged with the Commission against any mishap here," he announced.

"What do you mean, mishap?" snapped Zarias. "We've already had one."

"I mean, if we can't cope with this transuranic Thing," Cubbison answered fussily. "It might get all of us under control as it has Andersen and Mathers. In that case, we'd all be working to help It grow. The Commission is sending two rockets at once to take off all Station personnel if the situation here becomes untenable. But in case we're

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overpowered by the Thing before the rockets can get here, and fail to maintain intelligent communication by televisor, the rockets will drop plutonium bombs on the Station."

We stared at him. "You mean, destroy the Station?" said Burris. "Destroy all of us?"

Cubbison nodded, frowning. "It's regrettable, but it would have to be done if the Thing in there proves too much for us before the rockets come. We can take no chance of It's growing beyond the Moon in power."

Zarias' face worked, and he went up to Cubbison and took his hand. "I want to say that I am sorry, sir," the Greek said huskily.

"Sorry?" Cubbison asked annoyedly. "Sorry about what? Really, Doctor Zarias, you are being obscure."

But we knew what Zarias meant—we all knew, for we all felt the same shame as he did at our misjudgment of the man before us. Pompous, vain, stuffy—yes, Cubbison was all those things. But what we hadn't suspected was that he was the best scientist, and the best man, among us.

We knew, now! We knew it wasn't bureaucratic intriguing that had led the Commission to put him at the head of the Station. We knew, and were ashamed.

I don't think Cubbison dreamed what we were thinking.

"Now, Doctor Zarias," he went on briskly, "if you'll explain how you propose to deal with this Thing?"

"We've got to rush It before It gets stronger," Zarias said. "Burris, Drummond and I will wear these beryllium-shielded helmets. They may hold out the radiation well enough to let us shove the transuranic elements back to their chambers, and thus break It's body up."

"And if the helmets don't hold?" Marie asked anxiously.

No one answered her. There wasn't any answer.

Young Carew stood ready at the lab corridor door as we put on the helmets and adjusted them so we could see through the lead-glass eye-slits. Then we crouched at the door like sprinters before a start.

My heart was hammering and I'm not ashamed to confess that I was horribly afraid. Whatever It was that was in Main Physics, It wasn't anything a man had ever faced before. And if we failed—

Carew gave me no more time to think of that. He swung the heavy door open, we dashed through, and it slammed behind us. We ran down the corridor to Main Physics, and a wild elation soared in me, for aside from a tingling sensation all through me, I didn't feel anything unusual.

"The Thing isn't attacking us!" Burris shouted, muffledly. "We'll make it!"

Whether it was his shout or the fact that we burst into Main Psysics lab at that moment that did it, I don't know. I don't, in fact, remember much of the next few minutes. I do recall that as we burst into the lab, Mathers and Andersen were working in the same dazed, mechanical way with the canyon controls.

And I recall that they had arranged the lead trays that contained chunks or heaps of the glowing transuranic elements in a curious circular pattern around the conveyor-rack on which the tray of radiant Element One-forty-four still rested. And that between the One-forty-four and the other elements, the shimmering radiation of Its nerves pulsed and throbbed.

"One-forty-four is the brain—switch it back first!" Zarias shouted as we plunged into the lab.

And then it hit us. It wasn't the groping fingers of radiation that had fumbled with our brains the first time. They were stronger now, those intangible fingers, and they weren't groping.

They grabbed our minds and held them. I was still conscious, I was still Frank Drummond, but I didn't have a body any more. It held my brain and body. I felt the impact of Its mind. And there was no hate or fear or passion in it. There was only—wonder.

It had picked up us three men, had picked us up by our brains just as a child might pick up puppies by their necks and wonderingly examine them. And there was a strange and alien cleanness about that intangible grasp on my brain. It was as clean and strange as starlight.

I knew we had failed, and the part of me that was still Frank Drummond agonized in the knowledge. Then came the crash.

Burris had pitched forward so madly into the lab that he caromed into the blank-faced Mathers, even after It gripped us.

The grip on my brain suddenly relaxed. The crash had startled It, or had turned Its attention for a moment.

"Back out, Drummond!" Zarias screeched.

He clawed me back through the lab door and slammed it. Instantly, the clutch of It

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grabbed at my brain again. But through that heavy door, through our helmets, the clutch was not quite so strong. We could fight it, out here in the corridor.

"Burris!" I choked, but the Greek gave me a furious shove back down the corridor toward the Dome.

"No use! He's gone! Another second and we'll be gone too!"

CHAPTER IV

Destructive "Toy"

I BELIEVE we would not have got into the Dome if Carew had not heard us coming and had the door open in time. The slam of the heavier Dome door cut that unholy, wondering, alien grasp from our minds instantly.

I stumbled and would have fallen but for Marie's firm arm around me. Zaras' face was livid when he took his helmet off, and I knew then what my own must look like.

"Burris?" said Ramon Varez quietly.

"In there," croaked the Greek. "In there working for It now, with Mathers and Andersen. Soon, maybe, all of us will be!" He got a grip on himself and stopped that. "By heaven, no! No Thing of minerals and rays can conquer men! We'll find a way!"

"The helmets failed, then?" said Cubbison anxiously.

"Too thin," Zarias nodded. "It'll take a foot of beryllium to protect us. That means armor that we can wear into the lab. And we'll have to make it fast."

The Greek was indomitable. In the hours that followed, he sweated with the others as every working facility we had in the Dome was turned to the all-important task of making the foot-thick armor. Beryllium is light, but even so the suits would be heavy and massive. But we wouldn't have to wear them far, if we succeeded.

I'd like to be able to say that I worked as hard as Zarias. I didn't. I was too sick and shaky, for the next hours. Only shame finally made me conquer that and plunge at the job with the others.

"I'll go in this time, and perhaps Carew and Blauner will go with me," Ramon Varez proposed.

Zarias choked him off. "No! Drummond and I go again, and we will kill the Thing this time or not come out!"

I am eternally grateful to him for that. For until then, I had felt I dared not face It again. And after that, I knew I had to.

The hours went by. Our Earth-time schedule was forgotten. We had, to spur us on, Marie's report from the telltales that It must be growing steadily, since the canyons were working ceaselessly to build bigger the transuranic elements that were Its body.

The armor was finished, crude, massive and gleaming. Zarias told Varez and me his plan.

"We will all three try to do the same thing—switch that tray of Element One-forty-four back to its chamber, and blow the chamber. One-forty-four is the brain-center, the life-center, of It. It's the one vulnerable spot."

Marie interrupted with a cry that had so much horror in it that we swung sharply around to where she stood at the telltales. She pointed at the gauges.

"Look! Radiation is filtering into the Dome now!"

We looked. It was true. The new radiation, the radiation that was Its nerve-force and will, was showing on the gauges. And at the same moment we felt, faintly, the strange tingle of that radiation through our bodies.

"If It's filtering through even the Dome's walls," Carew faltered, "then It's so strong now—"

"So strong that our foot-thick beryllium armor is no more good than paper!" I finished hoarsely.

We knew what had happened. Hours before, the armor would have been effective. But in those hours, as we had worked, It had been growing bigger and stronger. Now It was too strong for armor of any kind. Soon It would be too strong even for the massive walls of the Dome.

"We're sunk," said Carew, and sat down heavily and put his face in his hands.

Cubbison's thin shoulders sagged a little. "I fear the situation is bad. Before the rockets can get here to take us off, It will control everyone in the Dome. And when that happens—"

When that happened, when we were all mindless puppets who couldn't answer the televisor, those rockets would carry out Cubbison's orders and obliterate us and the Station together.

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"I won't quit without at least a fight!" Zarias raged. "I'm going in there!"

HE STARTED to get into his armor. But Ramon Varez caught his arm.

"Zarias, wait!" cried the Costa Rican. "There's still a chance, if you'll let me try it! A stratagem based on psychology."

Zarias laughed mirthlessly. "Our sciences are our master passions right to death. Thanks, Ramon. But your psychology is no good against a Thing that doesn't live and think as we do."

"Some basic rules of psychology are the same for *any* kind of life!" Varez insisted. "Let me try! It'll take only a few minutes!"

He ran off across the Dome. We didn't look after him. We looked dully and tiredly at each other.

Marie came to me and stood close beside me. What was in her eyes shoud have made me feel happier, but it didn't. It agonized me to think what we two were going to lose.

Varez came running back. With him, he had a portable ray-projector, one of the compact boxes that can emit radiations of any type and are used to check protective shielding.

"When we burst into the lab," he said eagerly, "I'll use this thing to shoot quick spurts of every kind of radiation, in succession, right at It."

"And what good will that do?" cried Zarias. "Those weak test-rays will never harm It!"

"Give me the chance to try my plan!" pleaded Varez. "There's nothing to be lost. I'll go in there with you, and while I use this thing on It, you and Drummond can try to shove Element One-forty-four back to its chamber."

The Greek shrugged heavily. "I was going in anyway. You can bring your crazy gadget if you like."

I got into my armor without looking at Marie. I knew I wouldn't go into the labs if I looked at her.

Varez and Zarias were in their own armor. Varez held the ray-projector in one jointed beryllium arm. Zarias made a clumsy signal.

"All right!" his muffled voice boomed.

Carew flung the door open, and then we three were through it and clanking down the corridor.

And Its radiation hit us in a mighty blast as we reached the door of Main Physics. It had grown, yes—and now Its radiant will froze us in our tracks.

I felt again that clean, alien grip on my mind and knew I'd never get free of it. I saw Mathers and Anderson and Burris sweating over the canyon controls that kept building It bigger, and knew I'd be sweating with them till a plutonium bomb gave me release.

And then, unexpectedly, the grip of It on our minds incredibly relaxed. I felt Its mental grasp shift from wonder to interest to pure delight. Delight in the thing that Varez held, the box that was spurting an unseen kaleidoscope of rays in an ever-changing pattern! In that, for the moment, Its attention was wholly absorbed.

"*Now!*" yelled Zarias, and we two hurled ourselves forward across the lab.

My hand hit the switch of Chamber N's conveyor. There was a grind of gears, and the tray of Element One-forty-four started sliding swiftly back from its rack into the tube.

Wonder, delight, all the emotions of Its mind changed instantly to alarm! I felt Its thought, as a sudden wave of *hurt* fear. And then it was weakening, fading, as the element that was the brain-center of Its strange life slid back out of the pattern of its unearthly body, back to its distant, buried chamber.

"*Blow it!*" shrilled Varez, and Zarias' hand fumbled for another switch and closed it.

There was a dull, distant roar and the whole Station shook as the tonite explosive charge set under each chamber in case of emergencies blew Chamber N and the Element One-forty-four in it to fragments.

And then there was just a silence in the laboratory, in which I was conscious of Andersen and Burris lying senseless on the floor, and Mathers standing and looking down stupidly at his hands. The tingling force was gone, the impact of Its mind was gone, the shimmering glow of its radiation-nerves was gone. There was nothing here but a pattern of trays of transuranic elements, a pattern that had been a strange living body but that was now a dead one.

I FELT the others crowding into the lab and helping me out of my armor. Marie was crying as she clung to me.

"How did you do it?" Cubbison was asking Varez over and over again.

Varez looked down at the little ray-projector. "This did it. To It, this was a delight-

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ful toy, a toy of radiation, calculated to catch the interest of a creature whose life was radiation, just as a kitten would catch a human child's interest. Psychology—some of its rules are basic. For though It was transuranic, unhuman, non-normal, yet even so it was also very young, and could be distracted by the right kind of toy just as a young child can be. That moment of distraction gave us our chance."

Cubbison beamed. "You've saved the Station, you three! I'll report to New York at once. We shall be careful in future to avoid repetition of this danger. But Transuranic Station's work can go on, thanks to your heroism."

Zarias laughed. He laughed, but we saw now that there were tears in his eyes and running down his cheeks.

"We are heroes, yes," he said. "We are heroes, because we have killed a baby."

His voice lashed bitterly. "For It was just a baby, a baby trying to live and grow up in a wholly alien and hostile world. And we did it to death! Curse all of us for it! What are we but a lot of mucky little apes, strutting around now because we murdered something that could have been bigger than ourselves? It wasn't human, it wasn't of our cosmos, but it was clean and passionless and shining, and it might have made this whole universe one vast and wonderful mind and body! But it wasn't human so we had to kill it—we heroes!"

He put his face in his hands and sat down blindly in a corner.

Varez looked at him. "He was too many times under Its influence," he murmured. "He'll get over it. I—I think I know how he feels."

I thought I knew, too. That burst of wonder and delight at Varez' "toy," that hurt, bewildered grief of the last moment—they were shaking me, too.

Maybe Zarias was right. Maybe we had killed something that could have been bigger and finer than humanity. But still, this isn't a transuranic universe. It was the stranger here, not we.

And, I have thought since, maybe it was only a forerunner. Beyond our old range of elements, the potentialities of the transuranic realms still beckon man to create. Perhaps, someday, another It will be born thus which will not die, but will live on after man's day is finished, as his strange successor and son.

○

Forecast for the Next Issue!

WHEN Earth's cities face entombment and death, scientist Brad Lilling alone can save them—but he is hunted both by the authorities and by those who conspire against them in THE FACELESS MEN, by Arthur Leo Zagat, next issue's amazing complete novel. It's a fascinating epic of the future packed with surprises!

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By JOHN BARRETT

Carl Reese and Thela Brill dodge the Martian death in their space ship—only to face a far greater threat!

BRAINARD died on the third day after they set out from the wreck. Carl Reese and the girl, Thela Brill, scraped a grave in the sand with flat pieces of rock, and laid him in it on the litter they had used to carry him. They covered it with rocks to keep the sand wolves out, and set off again across the desert.

That day they did not go far. The sun came down through the cloudless Martian sky like a hammer. Every hour or so they had to creep into the shadow of the rocks and rest. It was about mid-afternoon when the girl collapsed. Carl carried her to one of the shallow caves in the cliffs that were growing more numerous, and gave her the water flask to sip.

Her blond hair was grayed with powdery sand, and Carl saw there were hollows now under her reddened eyes, but even with the strain of fatigue, her clean-featured face was beautiful. He watched her slender throat as she sipped the water.

He thought, She can't stand much more of this. She's not built for it.

The flask was still heavy when she handed it back.

"You'll need more than that to keep you going till sundown," he said.

She shook her head. "You better go on alone. It's getting so I can't see very well."

Carl Reese looked out at the crumbling rock and sand. It was not the heat that got you. The middle of this desert was no warmer than a cool day back on Earth. But the sun, pounding down through the thin air dehydrated you and did funny things to your brain. And if you stood up under that, the glittering sand drove you blind.

"We might as well stay here for the night," he said. "It's as good a place as any."

"How much water is there left?" she asked.

"There's a quart in the other flask," he said. He knew there was hardly a pint, but if he had said so, she wouldn't take any more.

She leaned back against the rock, and squinted at the shimmering wasteland. "Do you think Brainard really saw a ship?" she asked.

"Of course he did. Brainard wouldn't lie about a thing like that."

"How could he see a ship on the ground when we were falling at six hundred miles an hour?"

"He could see the sun flash on the metal," Carl said.

SHE pushed the grayed curls back from her cheek. "But if there was a ship we should have found it by now."

"Not necessarily," Carl said. "We haven't been traveling very fast."

The girl looked at her hand that was covered with gray dust from her hair. "I'm a mess," she said.

"You ought to try and sleep a little," Carl said. "You were taking care of Brainard all last night."

"No, I'm not sleepy."

Carl sat there watching her. In a few minutes he saw her eyes close and her head droop forward on her knees. She did not wake up when he laid her down at the back of the cave and shoved his jacket under her head.

When the sun sank and the chill began to make him shiver, Carl went outside to look for fuel. As usual there were no plants, not even a blade of dried grass, but in the face

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There beside Thela, Carl waited for the ripping explosion which would send them into nothingness

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of a nearby cliff he found again a ledge of coal. At least, he thought, the desert furnishes us one thing, and it keeps us from turning to ice in the night.

He carried back an armful, and followed the procedure of the night before, breaking the lumps into little pieces, and grinding a few of them into a black powder that would burst into flame with a second shot from the heat gun.

When the fire was going, he gathered enough coal to last through the night, and sat down to doze away the hours.

Nights were the worst. In the day-time there was always the next patch of shade to be reached, or you had the compass to check. Even the job of putting one foot ahead of the other was something to concentrate on. At nights, with only the flames of the fire, and the moan of the wind in the rocks, your mind wandered, and once more you were streaking through space in an Interplanetary Patrol ship with home port on Earth only twenty hours away.

You were in the pilot's seat pointing out interesting landmarks on the planet Mars to the pretty, blond girl from cabin three who was standing beside you. And you were wishing that her smile and good humor meant something personal, knowing all the time that it was only because she and you and the five men in the main cabin had uncovered information that was going to stop a threatened invasion of Earth by the little men of Jupiter. And then the dream suddenly turned horrible as the ship was caught in an invisible net that jammed the controls under your hands, and hurled you down upon the face of the Red Planet.

Carl woke up sweating, his fists clenched, his arms aching from the fight with a phantom rudder lever.

The flames had dwindled to red coals. He saw the girl was shivering in her sleep. He built up the fire and lifted her closer. She opened her eyes.

"I was dreaming I was still working in the consular office," she said vaguely. "And the director told me to put a note on the bulletin board informing the employees that we were about to enter the one hundred and forty-third Ice Age."

"The sun will be up in an hour," he said.

They sat watching the rocks and the cliffs take shape in the half light of dawn.

"Sometimes I wish you weren't such a good pilot," she said wearily.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the way you pulled the ship out of that dive so that only four people were killed, instead of seven."

Carl stared into the fire. If we don't find something today, he thought, she'll crack up.

He handed the water flask to her. She shook her head.

"Take some," he said sternly. "You've only had a couple of swallows since yesterday noon."

"How much have you had?" she asked.

"I've had my share," he said. "I feel pretty good."

"You're a liar," she said evenly. "You haven't had any."

CARL swore to himself. What could you do? You couldn't hit her over the head, and force it down her throat when she was unconscious.

Outside the rocks changed from deep rose to light pink and then to glaring yellow. Already the sand was beginning to sparkle.

"If we do find that ship, what good will it do?" she asked. "It'll be a wreck like ours was—only worse."

"Brainard said he thought it wasn't wrecked."

She covered her eyes from the glare of the sand. "To me that doesn't make sense," she said. "Those fiends from Jupiter aren't stupid. They'd know that if they let anyone get through their electronic beam net from either side, the cat would be out of the bag."

"But the last news report we received before we hit the net had an item in it announcing Dekmar had just landed on Mars with his new, experimental ship."

"Dekmar has a reputation as a crackpot. Maybe he was transmitting from space somewhere near earth. With him it might have been some sort of a publicity stunt."

"I think you've got the wrong idea about Dekmar," Carl said. "He's a crackpot in some ways. Lots of bright people are, but he's sincere. If he said he was broadcasting from the Lusarian Desert on Mars, that's where he was."

"Then why didn't he say something about the net?"

"They said his broadcast was cut off right after it started."

"If he was smart enough to get a ship through the net, why couldn't he get a visaphone signal through it?"

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Carl felt the anger swell up in his throat. He stood up. "All right then. Have it your way. It was all a hoax, and Brainard didn't see a ship, and maybe we're going to fry out here in this desert. What of it? Is it a crime to be an optimist? Just because—" He stopped. She was sobbing.

"I'm sorry," he said gently. He thought, It's beginning to get me, too.

She stood up slowly and brushed the sand from her clothes. "No, you're right," she said. "I don't know why I talk like that. I guess I just want you to argue against me. When you tell me I'm wrong, it makes me feel better."

Carl rubbed his prickly chin. She was sure a hard one to figure out. "We better get moving," he said, "before it gets too bright." He started to give her the water flask, and then saw she was going to balk again. He took two swallows himself and handed it to her. She took two swallows, also.

They made good time for the first two hours. After that the sun was torture. By midmorning they were forced into the shade again. Carl felt his leg muscles begin to quiver as he eased himself back against the rocks. He looked at the girl and saw that her face was white.

"You lie down for a while," he said. "I'm going to climb this rock pile and look around." He got up.

"I'll go with you," she said. "Just let me rest a few minutes."

"You're too tired," Carl said.

"I'll be all right in a few minutes."

They rested for a half hour, and then the girl followed him up through the jagged boulders. He kept looking back, waiting for her to say she had had enough. She followed him silently. Her finger tips were bleeding, and there was a long red scrape on her calf. It took twenty minutes to reach the flat top.

Carl stood up shakily and looked around. The desert stretched for miles, a waste of rock and sand, shimmering under the wavering air. He looked west and saw that their way would soon be blocked by deep, sheer canyons.

HE FACED the southwest, and something bright made him blink. He opened his eyes wide. On a low mesa-like outcropping near the edge of one of the canyons lay a rocket ship. The metal was smooth and unscarred. It rested there as if it had been landed gently.

"I can see it," he told the girl. "It's about three miles away." He leaned down and helped her up beside him.

"Fire your gun at a rock," the girl said. "If there's anyone aboard, he'll hear the explosion."

Carl took out his heat pistol and aimed at a large flat rock near the base of the pile. A long blue flame speared out. Carl kept his finger on the trigger, and the rock suddenly exploded with an ear-shattering crack. They looked toward the ship. There was no sign of a response.

The walk across the last stretch of sand seemed endless. There was no chance to stop or rest. The sun drove them on. Carl thought, If there's no water aboard her we're finished. Fifty feet from the big hull he stopped.

"Dekmar!" he called out.

The metal rang to his voice. In the canyon beyond he heard a tiny rock slide rattle into nothingness.

"Maybe it's not Dekmar's ship," the girl said. "Maybe it's been here for years."

"It's Dekmar's ship, all right," Carl said. "I can tell by those ridges running down the side of the hull. I happened to be at the factory one day last spring when he was having them put on."

They walked around behind the tail pipes and found the hatch in the other side. It was partly open. Carl started toward it, but the girl grabbed his arm.

"What's that?" She was pointing to a wide trailing furrow in the sand by the hatch.

Carl felt a prickling sensation along his spine. "I don't know," he said. "It looks like the track of some animal." He swung open the door. "Whatever it is we've got to get in out of this sun." He stepped over the high threshold.

The inside of the ship, protected by the heavy insulation in the hull was cold. Carl blinked into the darkness and yelled out, "Dekmar!"

There was no answer. He began rolling back some of the shutters covering the ports.

The girl came up beside him. "There's a light in one of the forward cabins."

Carl looked down the alleyway and saw a small light burning over a desk. They walked cautiously toward it, and came out into the control room near the nose of the ship. The light threw long shadows over a big panel of levers and dials. In one corner of the panel three meters were glowing red.

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"His visaphone set is still on," Carl said. "He must have been interrupted while he was broadcasting." He stepped toward the panel and almost fell over a chair lying on the floor. He picked it up and saw the back of it was splintered. He glanced quickly around the cabin. On a table by the control panel was a small metal box. The lever on the side of it was almost twisted off. Then he saw the door hanging crazily by one hinge.

"It looks like there's been a fight," he said. He found a switch and turned on the lights and heat all over the ship. Walking back along the alleyway, he saw that the bulkheads had long scratches in them, and two flush lights overhead had been smashed.

He reached the hatch and stepped down to follow the trail in the sand. It led to the cliff edge. He was bending down, trying to make sense out of the furrow when he heard the girl scream.

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LOOKING up, he saw her standing in the hatchway. She was staring wildly behind him. He did not wait to look around. He ran to the ship, jumped inside and yanked the door to. At the same instant something hissed through the air and whammed down across the hull. Carl bolted the hatch.

"What is it?"

"A snake." The girl's voice was faint.

Carl looked out the port and his stomach seemed to turn over. The snake had a body as thick as a big tree, and a wide, plow-shaped head. It thrashed at the hull. Carl winced as its teeth scraped across the metal surface.

"Well, we know what happened to Dekmar," he said. "He must have left the hatch open while he was using the visaphone and the thing got him."

The girl was swaying on her feet. Carl caught her as her knees buckled. He found a cabin with a couch and then hunted for the ship's stores. There was water, gallons of it, and he found some biscuits. For the next half hour they sat in the cabin sipping water and gnawing at the biscuits. The girl kept looking out of the port.

"How could anything as big as that live out here?" she asked. "There's so little food, so little water."

"I've heard reports of these snakes in the Lusarian desert," Carl said. "The biologists say they're a hangover from an old type of animal. They don't have a carbon system metabolism. Their chemical system is based on silicon, and they can grind up pebbles and small boulders and get nourishment out of them. They have teeth like rock crushers."

"Rock crushers." The girl shuddered.

Carl stood up. "Get your mind off it," he said. "See if you can find us something a little more substantial to eat. I'm going to look over the ship and see if I can figure out how to operate it."

He was still checking instruments when the girl came to the door of the control room twenty minutes later.

"Well?"

"I think I can run it," Carl said. "Everything seems to be standard except for one thing." He pointed to the square box on the table by the panel. "There's a mess of tubes and coils in there that don't make any sense. They must be important. They're connected by wires to the cables that run down the ridges in the hull."

"If it doesn't have anything to do with the controls, why can't you just forget about it," the girl said.

Carl frowned at the box. Above the twisted lever was the word *Reduction*. There was an arrow showing which direction the lever should be moved.

"I found something to eat," the girl said.

They walked back to the cabin that had evidently been made for a small dining room. The girl sat down opposite him and Carl suddenly stiffened in his chair. She was transformed. Her hair was soft and shiny again. The gray dust was gone from her skin. She had found some silky green cloth and made an impromptu skirt and a cross hatch halter above. He looked down at his torn clothes, felt the gritty powder on his arms and legs.

She laughed. "It's at the end of the hall," she said.

The shower was warm and there was soap that smelled like spices. As Carl rubbed himself dry on the big yellow towel, he looked around at the soft green and black tiles and thought, If this is the life of a crackpot, I'm all for it.

The meal and the sight of the girl opposite did something to him. When he walked back to the control cabin he was whistling. The girl came and stood in the doorway.

"Are you going to try and get through the net?" she asked in a nervous voice.

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"Now don't get worried," he said. "If Dekmar got through, the ship must have some protection around the hull."

HE STARTED up the rockets and boosted the ship gently off the sand. After two wide circles over the desert to get the feel of the controls, he pointed her up and turned on the power. The girl moved over into the acceleration seat. Out of the corner of his eye Carl saw her strap herself in. She gripped the arms tightly. Her face was pale.

The net was a thousand miles up. When the altimeter showed eight hundred miles, Carl slowed down and felt his way along. At nine hundred the controls began to drag. He shut off the power and the ship dropped back. The controls were freed.

He tried it again, nosing up slowly. This time the levers almost jammed before he could shut off the power. The ship fell, whirling and looping crazily. It dropped five hundred miles before he could pull it out. Carl was sweating when he brought it down gently on the desert.

"Let's not try that again," the girl said.

Carl stared out at the sky. "I see how they're doing it," he said. "They have a power plant sustained on an antigravity ray somewhere above the Rapathian Mountains, and it shoots out a beam shaped like an umbrella clear across the solar system." He swung around to the control panel. "Still, Dekmar got through." He reached across and fingered the dial of the little box on the table.

"Do you think we ought to fool with that?" the girl asked.

"We can't stay out on this desert forever, can we? Besides, if we don't get that information back to the home government offices pretty soon, it'll be too late." He found a switch at the back of the box and pressed it. A strange throbbing ran through the ship. Carl moved the twisted lever gingerly in the direction of the arrow. Sparks shot out of the loose contact points and the throbbing speeded up.

The girl cried out. "Look! The rocks are changing."

Carl spun around in the chair. For a second he thought his eyes had gone bad. The rocks outside the port were swelling up out of the desert like balloons. He realized what it was.

"Reduction! Of course! It's not the rocks. It's us. We're getting smaller."

Outside the port little pebbles were expanding into gigantic, rough-hewn boulders.

"But I don't feel any different," the girl said.

"Of course not." Carl had to raise his voice above the throb of the Reducer. "Everything inside the ship gets smaller proportionately. The ridges on the outside of the hull must create a field." He turned back to the panel. "And I've got a hunch this is going to get us through the net."

He leaned over to the table and moved the lever down another notch. The girl came over beside him.

"Look," Carl said. "The net acts on big things. If we were reduced to the size of bacteria, there wouldn't be enough power concentrated in one spot to affect the controls. We could slip through."

The rocket rolled suddenly as the flat sand surface under it became an uneven plain of craggy rock. Carl turned on the keel jets and lifted the ship clear. He looked out at the faces of sand grains that had expanded to glassy mirror-like sheets. 'The ship's about two inches long,' he thought. His stomach felt as if it had a lead ball in it. He tried the controls. The ship responded perfectly.

"But we can't keep getting smaller," the girl said. "You just can't keep concentrating a thing."

"Now take it easy," Carl said. "Evidently there's some sort of a mass dissipater connected with this. I don't know how it works, but Dekmar must have known what he was doing."

WITH a jerk, he started the tail jets and the ship roared forward and upward. The air was no longer clear. It was filled with hundreds of little particles that bumped gently against the hull. The girl started back when one touched the port.

"Dust particles," Carl said. "At our size they look big."

He turned on full power. The ship spurted upward through a gray storm. The dust, Carl saw, was not impeding their progress. The particles touched the hull and bounced away. He set a course for Earth and turned on the interplanetary drive. At this size they would need speed to get anywhere.

With his hands still on the controls he turned to the girl. "Move it back to zero," he said, jerking his head toward the box on

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the table, "but don't shut off the switch. I don't want to take any chances of the ship going back to its original size."

The girl shoved back the lever slowly. The throbbing noise sank to a low surging sound.

"The lever's loose," she said.

"Just be careful with it."

She came back to the port. "The air's clear now."

"I think that means we're in the beam," Carl said. "Ionized air would dispel the particles." He felt the ship buck slightly. Through the port he could see flashes of blue light crackling along the hull. He jiggled the controls. They were a little tight, but they weren't jammed. Suddenly he felt them come free. At the same moment something bumped the hull.

"It's a dust particle," the girl said. She pressed her face against the port, staring forward. "It's as big as a house."

Carl laughed. "We're through." He checked the course to make sure it was set for Earth, locked the controls, and stepped over to push off the Reducer switch.

Afterwards he thought that his elbow must have hit the lever as he reached for the switch. It happened too fast to be sure. He was aware only of the blinding blue flash and the jerking contraction of his muscles.

When he came to the girl was kneeling over him, wiping his face with something wet and cold. His ears were aching with the throbbing scream coming from the reducer. The lever to it was lying on the floor.

"How long have I been out?" He had to yell to make himself heard.

"About fifteen minutes."

He started to get up and pain like a knife stab shot through his skull. He eased back and felt his head.

"You hit a ledge on the bulkhead," she shouted. "I bandaged it. I tried artificial respiration, ammonia, everything. I thought you'd never come to."

He shook his head and stared at the table. Suddenly he began to laugh. "Automatic control," he yelled, pointing to the letters that were flashing on and off. "It says automatic control. What a joke. There isn't any control."

He saw the girl watching him, saw the fear in her eyes, the tight line of her lips. It sobered him instantly. He struggled to his feet. "Let's get out of this racket," he yelled.

They crossed the alleyway to a little cabin, and Carl closed the airtight door. The reducer was still screaming, but it sounded far away. Carl leaned against the door, listening. It was like a siren out of control, climbing, climbing.

"I've got to stop that thing somehow," he said.

"You can't get near it," the girl said. "I tried once myself when you were lying on the floor. I touched the table and the shock almost jerked my arm off."

"But can't you see? I've got to stop it. If I don't we'll shrink. We'll shrink to the size of a molecule, an atom, an electron, and then— Well, there isn't anything smaller. We'll disintegrate into a quantum of energy, or something."

"Wait!"

CARL took his hand off the door latch and turned around.

"All right, then," she said quietly. "Let it happen that way. I'd rather have it like that than seeing you on the floor again, blue and not breathing. "

Carl looked at her eyes that were calm now and steady. He thought, And I was scared to death she was going to crack up.

He said, "I'm going to try and cut the wires to the thing, anyway. If we can shut off the current supply, it'll stop." He stepped out into the screeching din of the alleyway.

They found a small torch in the ship's stores and Carl tried cutting the metal bulkhead on the outside of the control cabin where he calculated the current supply would run. The metal was hard and the torch cut slowly. After ten minutes he pushed up his mask and took a breather. The bulkhead was hardly marked. Carl tapped it.

"Must be another of Dekmar's inventions," he yelled at the girl. He put down the mask and tried again. Finally he gave up and shut the torch off.

He walked to the doorway of the control room. He took out his heat gun and aimed it at the box. The blue spear of flame did not reach it. It stopped short about a foot away, and splattered as if it were ricocheting against something hard. Carl tried it from another angle, another. The gun began to heat up under his hand, but an invisible shell of energy blocked off its beam from the box.

He walked back into the cabin across the alleyway. The girl came in behind him and

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fastened the door. Carl laid the hot gun on the table.

"Well, I guess that's that," he said. He sat down on a bench by the port and contemplated the deck.

The girl came over and sat beside him. For a long time she gazed out through the glass, saying nothing, and then in a weak voice she asked:

"Do you suppose those are molecules?"

Carl looked up. Outside was a tremendously enlarged section of a dust particle. It was almost transparent, and made up of little dots that jerked to and fro.

"I suppose so," he said, trying to keep his voice steady. Molecules, he thought. Molecules, then atoms, then electrons and then—

He closed his eyes and tried to banish the dancing dots from his mind. He could feel his heart thumping heavily in his chest. When he opened his eyes again, the dots had expanded. Each dot, he saw, was made of colored spheres arranged in a pattern—four blue, one red and two orange. The patterns twisted slowly, passing through one another like squads of soldiers in a complicated drill, yet all the time holding their arrangement. Far out from the port he saw another group of three green and two yellow spheres.

The scream of the Reducer went up another notch. The lights in the ship dimmed and went out.

"It's drawing off all the current," Carl said. Splashes of red and blue light were playing over the girl's body. She moved closer to him, wide eyes fixed on the port. Carl felt her fingers searching for his hand.

A red sphere floated up to the port. It bulged and faded to a blurred pink, and the pink was darting lights that spread out, enclosing the ship.

This is an atom, Carl thought. We're inside an atom. The tightness around his chest grew into a constricting pain.

Then far out in the distance, the core of the red sphere swung into view—a mass of glittering diamonds. It drifted toward them, holding its shape till Carl was certain it was going to crash the ship. Then it separated, and one diamond hung before the port.

Carl, gripping the girl's hand, waited for a ripping explosion that would send them into nothingness. The explosion did not come. The trembling light floated toward them, and slowly dissolved into silvery powder that spread itself across a backdrop of blackness.

STAGGERING up to the port, Carl dragged the girl with him. Distant points of light hurtled past them. The ship was plunging into an abyss. No, it was plunging toward one of the tiny white points of light that was expanding, brightening into a ball, a sphere, a gigantic solid sphere with a scarred surface, with—

Carl was aware that his ears were ringing. The Reducer had shut off, its scream replaced by the deep, familiar roar of tail jets. The girl was shaking his arm and pointing.

"Don't you recognize it?" she asked. "Don't you recognize it?"

And of course he did recognize it, even though every ounce of logic in his makeup rebelled when he finally said:

"Yes, it's the Earth. The land mass, right in front of us is North America." He went into the control cabin and shut off the interplanetary drive.

It was quite a few minutes later, when they were skimming over the peaks of the Rockies with everything ready for a landing, before the pieces began to fit together in his mind.

"You know," he said slowly, "I guess it does make sense. We say space is curved. We say a beam of light, if it went far enough would end up at its starting point. In fact, some astronomers say that nebulae in one part of the sky might be the same nebulae we see in another part of the sky, and we're actually seeing them twice because the light has traveled clear round the universe. Well, then, if the universe is curved and self-contained in one way, it must be curved and self-contained in every way. It's like the old symbol of the serpent swallowing its own tail."

Carl looked over his shoulder. "Are you listening?"

She was frowning at the shiny plates in the after bulkhead. "Yes, I'm listening."

Carl turned back. He studied the topography unreeling itself on the visiplate, and eased back the accelerator lever a trifle.

"The way I see it, if light comes back to its starting point, there is no infinitely distant place. In the same way there would be no infinitely small size. There's no end or beginning to anything, and if you travel far enough in any one direction, you always come back to where you started from. Do you follow me?"

"Well—" She kept staring at the after bulkhead.

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"Did you ever study Kant?"

"Kant?"

"Yes, he's a very ancient German philosopher—lived way back when they didn't have a world government or anything. It was all in a required philosophy course I took at the University."

"I always steered clear of philosophy," she said. She did not take her eyes off the after plates.

"Well this fellow Kant claimed that time and space were just creations of our own minds, and he tried to prove it by extending the logical implications of them into the structure of the universe till they contradicted themselves and became meaningless. Let's see, how did he put it?"

Carl leaned back in the pilot's chair and scratched his head. "First of all he said the universe must be finite, because it's made up of the sum of its parts, and as it parts are units, you could never add up finite units and get infinity. Then he took the other side of the argument and pointed out that if it was finite, it must have limits, and if it has limits, it has limits in relation to something beyond it. And the universe is everything that is, so there couldn't be anything beyond, except more universe, and if it keeps on going like that, it isn't finite. But it's not infinite either, so what is it?"

THE girl started to say something, but Carl held up his hand. "Wait a minute. I'm not through."

"Kant's conclusion was that space and time were handy, man-made illusions. But maybe it's the idea of infinity that's the man-made illusion. It's the idea of infinity and beginnings and endings that cross you up when you try to reason out how small things can become, or how large the universe can be.

"We admit the universe is curved and self-contained in one way when we say light returns to its starting point. It must be curved and self-contained every other way too. And just as there's no infinite distance, so there's no infinite size, large or small. Whichever way you look at it, it's part of a circle, and if you travel far enough in any one direction, you always come back to the place you started from. Maybe exploding atoms and expanding galaxies are the same things from different points of view." He took a breath. "Now what were you going to say?"

"Are we going to land at Francisco City?"

It took him a few seconds to get his mind down to the question. "Those were the orders that came through fifteen minutes ago. What's worrying you?"

"There'll be visigraph reporters and cameramen, won't there?"

Carl twisted around in his seat to see what it was she kept looking at. It dawned suddenly. The shiny after bulkhead plate made a perfect mirror. All that time then, he had been talking to himself. She probably hadn't even been trying to listen.

"Don't tell me you're nervous."

"No, but—" She spread out the fold of her silky skirt. "Do you think it looks funny? It's really just a piece of an old parachute."

Carl hung on to the controls till the dizziness cleared from his head. She dragged herself across a Martian desert, she fell through a hole in the Universe, and you were scared to death all the time for fear she'd go to pieces, and she comes out of it worrying about the cut of her dress.

"You look fine," Carl said. "You look wonderful." And as he circled the field and brought the ship down on the runway, it dawned on him that she really did look wonderful, and in two minutes she would be stepping out of this ship, and maybe out of his life for keeps.

He got up from the pilot's chair, and caught her before she reached the hatch.

"Thela," he said. "There's a crowd of people out there. I'll be taken to the director's office right away to answer questions about this ship, and the government officials will be quizzing you all night about everything we found out and—"

"Yes?" She moved away from him, eyes narrowing.

"After it's over let's get together."

"To discuss some techical aspects of space curvature perhaps?"

"You—" He started to pull her to him, but she twisted away. She was looking at the ports, jammed now with peering faces.

"I'm listed in the consular directory like all the other employees," she said. She smiled and opened the hatch.

Two government officials helped her down into the crowd. He watched her walk away, and kept thinking about the smile. It was like the Reducer. You thought things were over with and then you suddenly realized they were just beginning.

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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 10)

fiction should find it brilliantly new. And, oh yes, the novel and novelets will be illustrated by Finlay, Stevens and Finlay in the order named.

A DOG'S LIFE by George O. Smith heads the short story listing with eclat and is supported in kind by other ingenious and well written stf tales. The Science Fiction Book Review and this department will also be present to make April a big month on the THRILLING WONDER STORIES calendar.

LETTERS FROM READERS

THE letter department hit an all-time high this issue, so apparently our little October number featuring Heinlein, Charteris, Kuttner and company seems to have stirred up quite a fuss. The following, with which we start things off, is a pretty fair sample. . . .

SURPRISE! SURPRISE!
by Art Cosing

Dear Editor: Feeling very superior about it, I've always thought that popular fiction magazines were for fellows that spell the words out with their lips as they read, lugs that use dictionaries when they do crossword puzzles, and gals that use "DRAINO—the mouthwash used by movie stars," in hopes that Sonny Tufts will get wind of it. *But I was wrong!* When a story like "Jerry Is A Man" by Robert A. Heinlein in your October issue can see print, I must be wrong.

As such things usually happen, I came across your magazine and the story accidentally. I found it on a Washington bound bus. (Okey! I promise to *buy* the next issue.) Two stories were all I had time for on that trip, but believe me, I was deeply impressed by both—for strangely different reasons however.

The first, already named, showed me that a magazine like yours, lacking a great many of the "slick" magazine taboos, can come up with first-rate fiction. "Jerry Is A Man" is just that. It is first-rate satire, and a first-rate commentary on our present day world. In content, though not in approach, it bears many striking resemblances to the play "R.U.R.," a violent social satire by Karel Capek.

Heinlein deserves a terrific hand for writing it, and *you* deserve an even bigger hand for printing it.

The second story I read was Leslie Charteris's "The Darker Drink." This one got me because it was so obviously the contrast piece for Heinlein's story. Heinlein wrote his and said a little something, while Charteris wrote his yarn as he mentally counted your dough. Charteris writes for the happy shekels, as all working authors must, and makes no bones about it. He writes reams too. *Man, is that man prolific!* (More power to you, Leslie! Here's to your third million.)

Now, don't get me wrong. I like Charteris and the Saint. Whenever some blackhearted badman cringes in a corner and whines, "You're not Simon Templar? The twentieth century's brightest buccaneer? The Robin Hood of modern crime? The etc, etc?" I whistle and stamp my feet as loud as the next fellow, sometimes louder. (As witness the fact that I've bought nearly all of his many books.)

I get my kicks from Charteris, all right . . . especially when he kids himself in his own copy. You can just see him chuckling between the lines as he pockets the easy cash. Charteris has a real sense of humor, a humor that even Old Solemn As Death Hemingway must envy.

Of course, if you're going to be coldly objective about it, even the staunchest Saint fan has to admit that sometimes even his ha-ha stuff gets on your nerves. There comes a time when the Saint's consistent "You-can-shoot-me-full-of-holes-but-I'll-make-a-witty-before-I-hit-the-floor" attitude begins to pale, and put a strain on whatever credulity the reader had. (I like a superman as well as the next lad, Leslie, but the question arises: HOW SUPER CAN YOU GET?)

But let's talk about his story . . .

Using the hoariest imaginable plot—"It's really all a dream, hey!"—plus his own special brand of backspin on sub-plot and characterization, he weaves some of the cleverest cash and carry prose on the market—*but not without a little cheating.*

Everything revolves around that "mystic opal," Charteris assures you. "Keep your eye on that opal, boy!" he says. "It's a 'catalyst' for nightmares. Honest!".

Okey, you're game! You follow him to the very end. You tail Simon Templar through 13 pages of small print till you reach the last paragraph, the last sentence . . . This is it, you tell yourself! Now you're going to know all. Now all those locked doors will swing open, wide. But *no! The opal's gone. His pocket's empty.*

Suddenly it hits you. You've been "took" by the smooth talking city slicker! Charteris has dragged you along by the nose on nothing but sheer story telling ability, literally played with your intellect like a yo-yo. *The story's as empty as the Saint's pocket, and as intangible as that disappearing opal.* You've been duped, all right, but if it's any consolation, at least by an expert. We can't help but admire and respect your skill at making suckers of us all.—*806 Upshur Street, N. W., Washington 11, D. C.*

We have no comment to make on this one—save to hope that you keep on reading stf, Art, old boy, and that you keep on writing us about your experiences in the clovery field. Perhaps, at that, you were a little hard on Charteris. He's a mighty amusing hombre, in person as well as in print.

LOVECRAFTANIA
by Mrs. Muriel E. Eddy

Dear Sir: In the OCTOBER issue of "Thrilling Wonder Stories" I was intrigued by a letter from B. De Revere, in which he (or she?) mentioned liking H. P. Lovecraft's horror tales. As my husband and I knew H. P. L. personally, (he lived in Providence all of his life) I want to publicly thank B. De Revere for all the nice things said re: Lovecraft.

If you, dear editor, had known the man as we did . . . of his passionate love for cats, his dislike of all fish, and his hatred of daylight, you perhaps would realize that anything he wrote in the "weird" or fantastic line, he really "lived" . . . and I used the word "live" advisedly . . . even when he lay dying in the hospital, he asked the nurse for a pencil and paper and vividly recorded (for the doctor's benefit) exactly how he felt while dying.

Lovecraft was a tall, spare man. His skin was the color of tallow. His handclasp was firm but his hands were always ice-cold. He despised sunshine, and adored utter darkness. He wrote his best horror tales after midnight. His favorite food was sweet chocolate . . . he consumed pounds of it, and cheese and fruit. He loved coffee smothered with sugar . . . as strong as love and as black as sin!

Lovecraft's marriage was short-lived and his divorce was conducted quietly and without press notices. We sympathized with him in his every mood, because we knew him intimately and well—we often visit his unmarked grave in beautiful Swan Point cemetery in Providence, where a huge shaft in the center of the burial plot proclaims that his parents sleep there. His grave was somewhat sunken, last time we visited it, and covered with creeping green myrtle vines. His very spirit seemed hovering over his grave as we stood there in silent prayer for a man whose genius shall ever live, after his bones have crumbled into dust.

During his lifetime, we used to tell him that his

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stories rivalled those of Edgar Allan Poe. He "pooh-poohed" the very notion! He considered his work nothing at all, and never displayed any vanity. He wrote simply because he HAD to write . . . from an inner urge that would not let him sleep. May he rest in peace!—*125 Pearl Street, Providence 7, Rhode Island.*

After reading this letter we cannot but feel a certain sense of remorse at some of the flip things we have uttered in this column about the late HPL. Like him, we lay claim to a fondness for cats and a completely reverse sentiment toward creatures of the sea.

Thanks, Mrs. Eddy, for a fine tribute to a figure whose stature, despite adverse opinions of a goodly portion of his work by such carping souls are ours, has grown steadily larger since his passing. You were greatly privileged to have known him in life.

MORE OF SAME
by Ralph Glisson

Dear Editor: Some of the readers of your estimable publication may recall a letter I wrote (before "The Cleanup") with loathing and disgust. I received quite a few scathing notes and numerous foul names were heaped upon my hapless head at the time as a result of said letter. I am thoroughly abashed.

In this letter I made several nasty remarks anent the late H. P. L. with unpleasant consequences. I can only enter a plea of nolo contendere now and defend myself on the grounds of ignorance—having had the unfortunate luck to read "The Dunwich Horror" (which I still think is a surprisingly repulsive story) and "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" in close succession and in the heat of the moment I dashed off that ill-omened tirade.

I have read since then "The Shadow Out of Time" and others; my disgust has turned to worship; I am prepared to listen to a hearty chorus of "I-told-you-sos." The thought of hundreds of people, whom I don't even know, hating me and thinking of me with naught but murder in their hearts, has driven me to this.

I know how fanatical fans can get. I am a fanatic for C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner and sometimes my madness makes me do strange things. Please print this! Print it so they will forgive me! I can't sleep or eat! It's driving me maaaaad!

Your squib under W. Weber's letter had touches of insanity. Question: Does a stf ed have to be mad or is it the job that drives him there? Sometimes I am inclined to think that you, dear editor, are a letter-hack at heart.

The tongue cannot tell my joy in the Oct. TWS. There are no suitable words to express my pleasure in your recent renaissance!

"Jerry Is A Man" was colossal; "The Tongue Cannot Tell," stupendous; "The Darker Drink," wonderful. BUT . . . I have several words for Mr. Kuttner . . . "Gad, sir, how could you?"

Don't you think that you were a little tough on Williamson? After all, "Legion" was a trail-blazer, a beginning, a little halting, a little lame in places, but every child has to learn to walk. It can't be compared too critically with the opera of today written by those authors who have profited by the trial and error of such as Williamson. "Legion" may not have had dialogue, style, smooth-writing but it had Imagination; it had "Wonder"!

What happened to your address, Ralph? Did you mislay it or didn't you dare? At any rate, when we review a book we treat it as a book or try to. Granted that THE LEGION OF SPACE by Jack Williamson was a pioneer. Granted that it had both imagination and "Wonder." Between board covers it must stand up to the same standards of characterization, dialogue and all-around appeal demanded of any other volume of fiction.

It was, however, a succession of ingenious horrors, handled expertly and with excellent pace. As we believe we said, it provides first-rate entertainment for those who make no further demands of their fiction. And we are the same "we" who so savagely assailed critics a few paragraphs back. We still think the book would have been improved by an occasional indulgence in human frailty by its protagonists—even laughter.

But that's ancient history and we hope every copy has been long since sold.

OLIVER RIDES AGAIN
by Chad Oliver

Dear Editor: Subject up for discussion—the October edition of THRILLING WONDER STORIES. Shall we discuss? Mais oui!

This issue was paced by the two novelets—both unusual, fascinating tales. I'd say that Charteris' *The Darker Drink* has a slight edge. The Saint has long been one of my pet fictional enchanters, and, despite my oft-expressed gloom over detective stories in stfantasy, this one was tremendous. Charteris has a faculty for spinning unforgettable adventures with fine characterization. His stories *live*—something that can be said for a comparative few of the space opera boys. It is useless to ask for more, I know, since Charteris seems to be pretty much his own boss, from all that I've heard. But we can dream, as the opium-smoker remarked.

Heinlein's *Jerry Is A Man* seems to me to be Robert's best story since he resumed his writing career—slicks notwithstanding. Like many of his tales, it is good for what it *implies*, rather than for what it *says*. What makes a man a man, hmmmmmm? And all presented in that sugar-coated style of his. First rate!

Realy, Ed., you don't know what a pleasure it is to praise TWS after all these years. You have made remarkable strides, sir.

The Tongue Cannot Tell, by Wellman, is no great shakes as a story, but the ideas expressed are significant—as well as indicative of the present trend in stfantasy. At last, human beings actually react to alien environments with more than a passing gulp and/or pursuit of the fair Princess Hwooo. (Who usually lays eggs, but is some chick anyhow.) Third place to MWW.

Kuttner's *Exit the Professor* was well-written, with a trace or two of humor, but not worthy of our Fair-Haired Boy. Miss St. Clair's *Probate* was somewhat better than her previous soma comas. Perhaps she has found her field in the short-short. Yes sir, the shorter the better. *The Time Twister*, by Brothers Flagg and Wright was a synthesis of all that is bad in time stories, and the ending tripped and fell right flat on its cliché.

The lead novel, *Donovan Had A Dream*, by James MacReigh, held me for twenty pages. It was fair enough, but hardly seemed worth the time. I glanced at the ending. *Darl, there's nobody watching now.* Oh boy! Oh goody! My *favorite* ending! Better even than SPACE PIRATES! I didn't finish the story.

Virgil Finlay is by far the best artist in the field today. He improves the magazine one hundred per cent. Stevens, too, is first-rate. Marchioni, as I have mentioned before, should take his talents elsewhere. Siberia, say, or the Belgian Congo. Bergey toned down the cover commendably—I like the water and the gnarled roots. The boat strains my credulity—and whaddayaknow! A girl on the cover. Will innovations never cease?

I enjoyed *The Reader Speaks*, per usual. I rather think that Poe is more entitled to his place in weird literature than is H. G. Wells in science fiction. Wells (with Verne) was a true pioneer, and as such deserves credit. He himself had no high regard for his fantastic novels, and rightly so I think. The characterization in *The First Men In The Moon*, for instance, would

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make Cummings blush with shame. His short stories were better. Wells has certainly written some brilliant things—*Tono-Bungay*, for instance. His science fiction novels were not among them, however.

The Book Review is a good idea; keep 'em coming. Your comments anent Williamson's THE LEGION OF SPACE were interesting and generally accurate. I enjoyed the book more than you did, however. It seems to me that a good adventure story is just as worthwhile as anything else, in science fiction or out of it. Mind you, I said a *good* adventure story. I thought that this one was such, despite patent absurdities. Wal, pard, them's my opinions, and yore entitled to yourn:—*c/o Mrs. Allen Baker, Kerrville, Texas.*

Well, as usual, Chad, you said it all, so we can only voice a meek (very meek) difference of opinion anent the late Edgar Allan You-know-who. As a pioneer in weird literature (unquote) it always seemed to us that he was no more and no less than a direct offshoot of the currently forgotten late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Gothic vogue, featured in English letters by Horace Walpole and Mrs. Shelley, in America by Charles Brockden Brown.

They featured horror and portentous atmosphere in gobs of heavily-adjectived prose—as witness Mrs. Shelley's "Frankenstein," which alone of that bumper crop of gooseflesh raisers is today remembered. No, to us, Poe is far more important as a pioneer of the detective story. But for him in the US, Wilkie Collins of England and Gaboriau in France, the Baker Street Irregulars would not be holding their annual meetings today.

But this column is rapidly turning into a sort of pseudo-literary discussion corner. From here on in we shall remorselessly hunt out bad puns.

TRY AND FIND ONE
by George Ebey

Hello: Do you know, laddie, there is more truth than syntax in your remark about primitives and classics in the October issue of TWS. Certainly Poe, Rimbaud, Verlaine and Rossetti and similar people owe their success to originality in concept as much as to their various, brilliant styles. Yet there is no set, literary rule that a "pioneer" may not set the forest afire when he blazes the trail. If Poe originated the "Poetic Principle" then he also perfected it—*Annabel Lee* and *Thou Wast That All to Me, Love* are cases in point.

Not to go into the subject too deeply but how did poor, old H. P. Lovecraft get into the act? We have here, in the October issue, a character hight B. De Revere who rushes to the defense of an author he will have dropped ten years from now. For your information. Bee Dee, *The Outsider* is an unassailable short story, the best twentieth century echo of Edgar Poe that exists.

When Lovecraft drew inspiration from Poe or Dunsany he wrote well. His own talent, however, proved pretty shallow. Eventually he created a cheesecloth mythology and a literary device—the Necronomicon—on which his reputation is based today. People who hold to the contrary are either trying to peddle his books or belong to the "connoisseur" clan—"fuddy-duddy connoisseurs of the second rate", in Raymond Chandler's inimitable phrase. Maybe these second rate minds have a natural affinity. Certainly HPL was a second rater all the way.

Well, all these dissertations take up space. The new editorial hand becomes apparent in this last issue with the slight switch in format. And look at the line up—Kuttner, Charteris, Heinlein and Ackerman. Particularly liked was the Saint novelet, which had me spinning on my funny bone, and the Heinlein ditto which was mighty lak' an allegory. Wellman's offering, *The Tongue Cannot Tell*, frankly surprised me. The idea behind it was very fine and the narration was very adult.

I'm also slightly nuts about Henry Kuttner's short, *Exit the Professor*. The other stuff I didn't read or didn't care for, take your pick. But this is definitely a top notch issue and *Thrilling Wonder Stories* begins to promise great things.

A word of commendation goes to the fellow responsible for the variety of illustrators recently appearing in the mag. The restricted print on the cover, the snappy interiors, the thought provoking fiction pieces make TWS a regular surprise package—one never knows what may be found therein. Incidentally, the new dep't, Science Fiction Book Review gives out with some solid criticism. I like.

As a matter of fact I begin to feel that I'm getting my fifteen cents worth out of the mag.—*4766 Reinhardt Drive, Oakland 2, California.*

Let's hope you continue to feel so, George. And while you continued the literary round table a bit beyond its appointed limits, you managed to express a thought which lies behind all ye ed's carping at primitives. To our way of thinking there is no reason why a new venture in fiction must necessarily be presented in second, third or fourth rate forms. Certainly, from the Iliad to Fielding and Smollett, to say nothing of the towering Greek playsmiths, original ideas *have* been tackled successfully by authors of adult talent. So why bow to a crudely presented primitive merely because it presents something new? There is small excuse for poor prose at this late date.

P. S. We gladly give you *Annabel Lee*, et cetera.

ALBUMIN FROM ALBION
by Michael Gealby

Dear Editor: It's no use! I just couldn't hold out any longer. I had to write in to tell you what I think of TWS and SS or have a nervous breakdown or something. Gosh! What on earrth is happening? This can't go on much longer.

What I mean is that with every issue TWS and SS improve by 100%. It can't go on! There is at least one outstanding story in every issue and no story is bad. Please do not take notice of these citizens who write in to say—"it was better in 1939"—etc. It just ain't so, brother.

I won't rate the stories for the simple reason that I think they are all good. I enjoy them all. I'll just mention a few which I think ought to go down as classics alongside of Wells' "Time Machine" etc. Kuttner—"Lands of the Earthquake" and "Way of the Gods". Leinster—"The Boomerang Circuit" and (best story of 1946) "Dead City". Coming up to date—"Circle of Zero" in SS and "Lord of the Storm". Both were really outstanding.

I like Bergey. I like Bergey's girls. Best inside illustrations of course by Messrs. Finlay and Stevens. You have some good newcomers too.

My favorite letters are by Chaddo and Ricko. There are a lot of queer types in THE READER SPEAKS.—*8 Burfield Avenue, Loughborough, Leicestershire, England.*

Thanks, comrade—but we'd feel a mite better about it all if we weren't acutely aware of the stfamine which you English fans have been undergoing for so many years until just recently. Come what may, however,

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we'll try to keep improving by a few percentage points at any rate. Toodleoo and pip pip.

UH-UH!
by R. A. Anderson

Dear Editor: You asked for it (don't say you didn't), so here it is:

Thrilling Wonder is here again,
The October issue, I should explain,
So we'll start at the first for this review.
Cover by Bergey—nothing new.
But wait! It really appears to me
It's a little more like what it ought to be.
The colors all match, no yellows and greens
To swear at each other through hair-raising scenes.
Now turn the page and get in the fray.
"The Reader Speaks," but what does he say?
Sneary is first. He should be in a cell
And kept there until he learns how to spell.
And then there's the person called B. de. Revere,
Who thinks that Lovecraft has never a peer.
Lovecraft was a genius—that much I'll admit;
A master of horrors and things from the pit.
But equal to Merritt? Of course he is not,
For Merritt remains the best of the lot.
His fantasy tales are equalled by none,
Not even by Kuttner, our favorite son.
The artwork is next—Finlay is swell.
Napoli and Kiemle are doing right well.
Marchioni is awful—his work badly drawn;
His pictures are full of terrible corn.
The stories are good—there's none of them bad,
But best is the Dream that Donovan Had.
Then there's the guy who writes of the Saint.
He's next in line with the "Darker Drink."
Tell Kuttner to write only novels to sell,
Leave shorts to others who can do them as well.
For a short is a short, wherever it's found,
But a novel by Kuttner is justly renowned.

—*921—16th Ave., S., Nashville, Tenn.*

Like da dirty son said—we asked for it. So. . . .

We're inured to horror, my dear Anderson,
To Grulzaks and BEMs and hemaglobin fun,
But never in all of our hair-raising years
Of struggling in vain with our inc. tax arrears
Have we ever come up against anything worse
Than an stf critic who does it in verse.
Your scansion loped off in a lop-sided gait
And while, for the most part, your rhymes they were straight,
We'd still like to know how in hades you think
You can couple up "Saint" with that "The Darker Drink".

Nuff said—almost certainly too much.

MERRITT'S MERITS
by James C. Tibbetts

Dear Editor: Your recent statement to the effect that you prefer Kuttner to Merritt for Fantasy has caused me to break an eleven-year silence in writing to Stf. and Fantasy magazines. I'll not attempt to belittle Kuttner's stories, as I think he is a fine author and by far the top writer for TWS and Startling. But I would like to point out a few things about Merritt's work.

First, and what is most important, I think, is that his yarns lose nothing in re-reading. They have been immensely popular for over twenty years with lovers of Fantasy. So far as I know, Merritt is one of the few great authors of imaginative literature who hasn't been debunked. E. E. Smith's earlier tales have been soundly pummeled, as have those of Lovecraft, as you well know. It is generally agreed that the Stf. and Fantasy stories of today are of a much higher caliber than those of, say, ten years ago. Yet Merritt's classics are still widely acclaimed and are still reprinted, though not in book form, I am sorry to say. To me, his literary output is as timeless as the music of Victor Herbert. A thousand Fantasy readers usually have a thousand opinions—all differing—but criticism of A. Merritt in reader's columns is practically non-existent. That is what I would call a proof of greatness.

Each of Merritt's top novels is well and carefully written. My definition of "top novels" would include everything except "Seven Footprints to Satan." He took a great deal of time in the preparation of each masterpiece and that paid off in the quality of style and plot continuity. The man was excellent in the handling of each facet of the plot. He could write love scenes—a department in which practically all other Stf. and Fantasy authors stumble badly. Take for example the Lur-Leif (or Dwayanu) romancing in "Dwellers in the Mirage." Or the lovemaking in "Creep, Shadow!"

He could avoid the old gimmick of a saccharine ending. There is very little happiness in the conclusions of "Dwellers in the Mirage," "Three Lines of Old French" and "Creep, Shadow!" And even the hero is killed in "Ship of Ishtar." A strain of tragedy seems to run throughout all of Merritt's works, and I say that is a part of his greatness. The constant sweetness-and-light and cut-and-dried "perfect" endings in most stories may be laudable from a moral standpoint but I for one don't like my reading to be black-and-white. I prefer shadings.

Pure fantasy? Merritt's descriptions of Gods and Goddesses, strange civilizations and their customs are superb. And how about the scene between Kenton and the King of Emakhtila in "Ship of Ishtar"? And that poem Kenton recites to the King! There, I stoutly insist, is the finest bit of pure Fantasy ever written.

Swashbuckling? Blood-and-Thunder? Dwayanu and Lur as they storm Sirk in "Dwellers." The action throughout "Ship of Ishtar" and "Face in the Abyss."

Humor? Larry O'Keefe's coaching the villainous priestess to sing "A Bird in a Gilded Cage" in "Moon Pool."

Sadness? The killing of his best friend by Leif in "Dwellers." The death of Evalie in the same story. The entire theme of "Three Lines of Old French."

Merritt's villains were epic achievements. They are truly gigantic in stature, as Chesterton says of Dickens' characters. Nimir, Lur, Madame Mandilip, Nergal, etc. Nothing stuffy about them.

I think Merritt had everything. I'm not a bit ashamed to rank "Ship of Ishtar," "Dwellers" and "Face in the Abyss" along with "Pickwick Papers," "Pride and Prejudice," "Les Miserables" and "Vanity Fair" as the greatest novels I have read. I only wish that some concerted action could be taken in favor of Merritt's output as has been done with Lovecraft, E. E. Smith, C. A. Smith, Van Vogt and others. Lovecraft has been practically canonized, and, like you, I can't understand why.

After wading through all this you are undoubtedly hoping I will be quiet for another long period. Since, however, my last letter to TWS, written in the Fall of '36, wasn't of a pleasant nature, I'd like to say that the magazine has improved tremendously and your comments to the readers the best I've ever seen in a Stf. or Fantasy publication. How you would have loved to reply to the "Staples" controversies of the 30's!

Don't get me wrong on Kuttner. He's fine. "Lands of the Earthquake," in Startling, was a gem.

But I'm afraid there'll never be another A. Merritt. —*Parkville, Missouri.*

Gol-durn it! Not a single pun yet—and the literary discussion goes on. Since we love it personally, let's hope the bulk of our readers will be forebearing and endure patiently. However, there are a couple of points. . . .

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One, why not try re-reading some of Kuttner's better jobs? Say, THE DARK WORLD or SWORD OF TOMORROW. It is our hunch these works will stand a number of perusals. Actually, Kuttner's work is very different from that of the late great A. Merritt on many, many fronts—too many to discuss here. But he holds up pretty well, despite the insistent and ever-odious comparison by the fans.

Most of Merritt's major works have been reprinted in pocket book form. And we recall reading three or four of them between board-and-cloth covers. So seek, and ye shall probably find. And thanks for the note on current progress of this magazine.

WHERE'S JOE?
by Guy Trucano Jr.

Dear Sir: First and foremost, my greetings, both to you and to such of the old fans who might still be reading the stuff. It's the first time in something like two years that I have sat down at a typewriter with the intention of doing anything regarding science-fiction. And it's not my fault either, since I returned only early this summer from a little visit to the Pacific.

The October issue was one of the best in the last year. Some new ideas and some new slants on the old.

DONOVAN HAD A DREAM, while not exactly a new idea, had some swell treatment, and was worthwhile reading.

JERRY IS A MAN, and THE DARKER DRINK were both new ideas to me. Although I must really admit that I have a sneaking preference for the Saint in his natural habitat. Both swell stories, though.

PROBATE gives a definitely new slant on our kind of man when faced by his superiors. THE TONGUE CANNOT TELL was a fairly good story although I have enjoyed other of Wellman's stories better.

Henry Kuttner has done much better than his idea of Kentucky hillbillies. Seems like the trend is away from BEMs to hillbillies now. And let's just skip TTT. I think you should have skipped it too.

Having by now come to The Reader Speaks, please let me take time for just one nostalgic sigh for the old days. After all this is the first chance I've had.

For Mr. Marvin's letter, you should have thrown out a huge welcome mat. Here's hoping he keeps them coming. And in spite of your somewhat erratic comments (you got almost to the old Saturn level there), I like Weber's ideas of toning the name down a little bit. I have got a few friends around here, but the sight of that name leads them to walk to the other side of the street and avoid me. I'm not kidding either. With just the picture, it could be passed off as a color illustration of an army experiment or something they ate, but the name, no.

Speaking of Kennedys, although I hate to do it, it usually starts something the editor has to cut to print the mag, whatever did happen to Joe. I mean the original Joe. And Ed, you asked a question of one G. C. Brown which I feel should be answered. It is people like you, sir, who pent up the souls of innumerable fans. And in endless reams grade A, government-type red tape, along with frustrating and nauseating censorious regulations. I daresay the average fan could express himself much better in man to man (no cracks) talks when the language flows slightly more freely and luridly.

And cheers to B. De Revere for his or her defense of Lovecraft. I refuse to go so far as to say that he easily edges Merritt, mainly because of the entirely different type of stories that they wrote. But please, no insults on the man. By the way, if anyone has any of his stuff for sale, please let me know.—*Dickinson, North Dakota.*

Joe Kennedy, we mournfully report, is now a collitch stewdent and has given up all but occasional fan sorties in favor of a fondly hoped-for Phi Beta Kappa key. However, we hope that he will find occasional time for a screed in this direction.

COLLECTOR'S ITEM
by Ted Sturgeon

Dear Sarge: Well, Sarge, or whatever your name is, I am hereby swamped.

Son, you have, whether you know it or not, kicked out a collector's item. The October issue of TWS is a credit to you, to science fiction, to your outfit, to your co-workers there and, above all, to your writers and artists.

By the well-known skin, you missed a laudatory letter from me when you dropped that—that— (Oh, I guess I better not use the word after all) that stuff about Wartears and Xeno. The only reason I didn't express my feelings at the time is that it would have run to about eight thousand words and I've got a word-rate, son. Suffice it to say that the coming of age of TWS is both thrilling and wonderful to me.

Stf, for all its escapist aspects, does one all-important thing. It makes people think. It not only makes people think, but it says, in effect, "If this bill passes Congress, *this* is likely to happen." Or it says, "If someone comes up with this invention, *this* is the kind of world your kids will be living in." And what passes Congress and, to a certain degree, what is invented depends on you and you and me too. That is solid thinking; and in the current stage of world affairs, we think solid or we go out.

The October issue of TWS is an example of that kind of thinking. From the compelling action-drama of James MacCreigh through Wellman's competent copy, this is a mature and thoughtful release. I wish to throw orchids particularly to Heinlein for his allegory (for it is that much more than a story per se) and to Hank Kuttner for EXIT THE PROFESSOR. This yarn is something we need more of.

Hank's yarn states wonder on wonder without going into detail about force-fields, magnetic fluxes, spatial aberrations, and so forth. Not enough people seem to realize the value of this kind of story telling.

If the average whodunit were told in this stf style, you'd have passages like, "Frank pressed the button at the side of the door, activating an eight-volt chemical dry-cell to its appointed chore of sending a surge of direct current through the coils of an electro-magnet which, in conjunction with a spring of posphor-bronze, performed a make-and-break action which caused a hammer to strike repeatedly against a quasi-toroidal metallic disc. The vibrations of the disc, transmitted through the atmosphere, resulted in a bell-ringing sensation in the ears of Camellia Twitchett." You'd rather—and so would I—have Frank simply ring the bell. On the same terms, I'm happy to have Uncle Les fly, with no discussion of his aerodynamic efficiency and the exact nature of his power plant.

I hereby, therefore, present *Thrilling Wonder Stories* with its first shaving kit (figuratively) in recognition of the achievement of its literary majority. Do it some more.—*151 Eighth Avenue, New York 11, N. Y.*

We hereby and promptly cut our downy cheek with the blade. Thanks, Theodore.

TRIPE, IT SAYS HERE
by B. W. Wood

Dear Ed: I recently got around to reading my first issues of T.W.S. and S.S. since 1939 . . .

Ed: "Aha, and what did you find?"

Me: "The stories were readable! (Ed turns pale.) Me again: "In fact, several were good!!! (Ed. swoons.)

Seriously, though, both T.W.S. and S.S. have come a long way since '39, and as far as I can see from the few issues I've managed to get (Apl. to Aug. inclusive), they're still on the upgrade. Keep it up. Well, as I see the Ed. has recovered, here's what I think of the mags in general.

Covers: Ugh! (Ed. hides behind Earle Bergey).

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What are females doing on the cover of a stf mag (don't answer that). Not that I object to females (sickly grin of relief from Ed. and Bergey) EXCEPT *ON THE COVER OF AN STF MAG!!!!* Now Bergey can draw, (horrible grin of delight from Bergey) so why not let him put a space-ship on the cover, huh? Just once?

Untrimmed edges: Readers of stf have always screamed for trimmed edges so why not satisfy 'em. After all, it improves the look of the mag., and anyway, I've never yet read a really good argument against them, so how about it, huh?

Stories: Hmmm. The novels and novelets in the issues I've seen so far have been pretty good, but your shorts are, with a few exceptions (such as The Sky Was Full Of Ships and Skit Tree Planet) tripe. The Bud Gregory series is one of the best I've ever seen, more please. Outstanding among the feature novels was The Kingdom Of The Blind by George O. Smith, an author I'm glad to see in the mag. On the whole the standard of stories is rising steadily.

Artists: Hmmm again. Marchioni: Poor. Mainly because he just isn't a stf artist. He hasn't got IT.

Stevens: Good. Keep him.

Finlay: What I've seen of his work is exceptionally good. Is probably your best artist.

Morley (I think that's his name.): AWFUL.

Kiemle: In the same class with Morley.

Well, that's that. Hope you don't mind my comments and insults (to Morley and Kiemle), but I really am trying to give you my views on the mags in a helpful way. Though you haven't the best mags in the field yet, Ed., you're certainly improving. Congratulations.—*23 Farnley Road, Birmingham 14, England.*

What with swooning, leering, hiding behind Bergey et cetera, you certainly do manage to give us a workout. For the most part, your opinions are appreciated to the utmost—but aren't you a little rugged on the short stories?

This brings up a point. It seems to us that an uncommonly high percentage of quasi-literate fandom has a lamentable tendency to weigh the merits of a story by its length. Frankly, we like the shorter length, consider it a much greater test of an author's ability than a novel or novelet. It puts a premium upon skill and form, where the longer jobs, affording their creators plenty of physical leeway, make no such demands.

Suppose, the next time you read us—always hoping that there is a next time for you—you consider the above factors while browsing, grazing or what have you through our pages.

DEARY SNEARY

by Rick Sneary

Dear Editor: Well after the pile of ego-boo I got in the Oct. issue I just couldn't let it slip by without telling you what I think of this much heralded issue.

First off the cover was an improvement. It still did not mach any part of any story, but—! There was less writing than usual. A thing to pe prased. And you say there will be less, so we can look forward to this evertime. I hope. The ship was odd but nice. Ditto girl.

As for the stories, I fear you went overboard on the big name stuff. Eather that or I was asleep when I read it. Anyway there wasn't a near-clasic in the bunch. (Not a bad story, eather, but I becoming use to that.) They were just nice, easy and enjoyable reading stories.

The best by far was *The Tongue Cannot Tell* by Wellman. A friend and I were arguing a short time ago, and he said that you couldn't write a interesting 'trip-to-the-moon type story any more. Well this wasn't so much the trip it self as the people. But it was darn good. It would be quite a job for a mear human to dicribe somthing so non-human as that. Personly I doubt it was just going to the Moon that made the Earth "seem flat" to him. He must have felt that way to begain with. It is doubtlessly the reason he built the ship in the first place. The pioneer is always the man who is not so much interested in the future as dissatisfyed with the present.

I suppose if I had never read any of Heinleins earler work I would have thought *Jerry is a Man* was a extry good story. But tho it shouldn't be, it is always a letdown to read something by a master that doesn't come up to his usual mark. It is a very charming story, and the charterers are full of life like in the old days, but still it lacks the grateness of old. Still I would call you a fool to turn down anything like it by him. He can still beat Kuttner any day, and I like Kuttner.

The Darker Drink started well, and was well writen, but it shows what happens when a writer gets out of his feild. Charteris is one of the best mystery writers, and I know he has read TWS a good many years, but still the plot (?) was very weak. Having it end like that was most dissterbing. If you explain it as dream, you have a very weak and poor story. If you except that the little guy could projecthimself and dreams into the Saints mind. . . . Oh well it was nice reading up tell the end: I wouldn't say I didn't like it, but could have been better.

The other three short stories were all good. Kuttner seems to be trying to explain "Bud" in a nother way. Oh well it's almost as easy to believe. The flying part is the only silly thing. I doubt it.

Aaaa the Read Speaks. And he is still saying a lot. Not the reader De Revere hasn't a right to his (I hope it's his) appion about Lovecraft, but I have read five stories, counting *The Outsider* and heard *The Dunwhich Horror* and can not say I liked any of them. I think Merritt much better at descriptive writing, and Heinlein (of old) better at making you feel a porsons feelings. As for the Outsider, I felp more pity for him than horror. But still if De Revere likes him—I'll take Hienlein. And you can't say I don't get in the mood of stories. I nearly died when the hero of a story I was reading got shot. IT'S true, so-elp me.

I would like to see a amature art contest very much. Tho Frankly I have a friend named Cockroft that would beat easy, but anyway give it a wearl. You can give em $5 or $10 or maybe a cover, and use the pic as inside art. Why not have them all draw the same thing as if they were on the payroll and you had asigned them a story to illo. Good idea huh?

As for the fan mag contest. You will have a better crop next year, maybe, but still I don't know. Fans, big fans don't write much fiction, as they don't like it. And you couldn't use many of out articles. But heck, you have reviewed most of the mags for years, you ought to have Known that. Well got to go. Thanks for a very good issue.—*2962 Santa Ana St., South Gate, Calif.*

Well, Rick, tell your friend Cockroach to give it a wearl. Seriously, for eminently practical reasons, we are not able to start a fanart contest. Wish we could give you another verdict, but thar she be.

Hope you're write about the fanmag contest. So far, as has already been stated, the crop has been mighty discouraging.

SO LITTLE TIME HAS COME

by Lin Carter

Dear Ed: *"The time has come" the Walrus said, "To speak of many things. Of apes and saints and chimpanzees, of TWS and kings."*

Which is a silly, but appropriate, way to start this letter. And without further ado, let's get about it.

Glad to see you are still maintaining the high standard of last issue. Good: The cover was amaz-

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ingly (or better yet—"thrillingly") good. *Donovan had a Dream* was quite readable. Some nice ideas there. Could have been longer, tho. Especially liked the idea of the Hags. Hope to see some more of MacCreigh's work, what do you say?

Am always glad to see Heinlein between your covers. *Jerry is a Man* was vurry amoozin'—the idea of controlled evolution has been sadly neglected of late. Get Bob to do an interplanetary yarn (novel, if possible) for you in the near future. The *very* near future.

Ah me, 'twas excellent to read a Saint story in TWS. Charteris has a refeshing touch, aptly demonstrated in such stf tales as *The Man Who Loved Ants* and *The Man Who Made Gold*. The first was about giant insects, the latter, man-made gold. No stf-addict should miss them. *The Darker Drink*, tho not very scientifictional (whew!) was still good. By Charteris, how could it help but be?

Shan't go through any lengthy and boring review of the remaining shorts. *The Time Twister* had a novel twist (pun intentional). *Exit the Prof.* was very good. Others fair.

The illustrations were all of definitely superior caliber. Finlay and Kiemle, that is. Marchioni . . . well, it was only one pic. Thank Ghod!

Now for the inevitable . . . that is. *The Reader Squeeks*. Ingrossing, lengthy, and personality-studded, per usual. The Sneer, Couvering and Brown are always interesting. Johnnie Marvin (male or female?) had a nice letter. Re Wally Weber's letter—how about *Mellerdramer Marvel Stories* for a title, or mebbe *Fiendish Fantastic Mysteries*.—*865-20th Ave. So., St. Petersburg, Florida.*

Okay, Lin, thanks for writing. Agree with you about Charteris.

PLEA FROM ABROAD
by G. R. Sant

Dear Sir: Would any of your readers take pity on an stfan who has been deprived of his favorite reading for several years and let me have any back copies he does not wish to retain. I do not mind how old or tattered they may be.

I am afraid this will have to be a gift as, under the currency regulations, I am not allowed to send money from the country, but if I can send anything in return for this generosity I will gladly do so.

I have just been fortunate in obtaining a subscription to TWS through a local bookstore and the discussion of previous stories in THE READER SPEAKS makes me realize how much I have missed in the past five or six years. I have been reading, as far as possible, science fiction and weird fiction in American magazines for nearly twenty years and their absence from the British market has been a real hardship.—*411 Osmanston Road, Derby, England.*

Well, fellows, how about it?

OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION
by Pfc John M. Cunningham

Dear Editor: The *new* TWS is certainly an outstanding contribution to the world of science fiction. Beginning with the illustrations and right on through to "The Reader Speaks"—IT IS TOPS spelled in capitals. Gone are the faults, among which were obnoxious drivels of one "Sgt Saturn", poor illustrations, and second rate stories. Indeed the future of THRILLING WONDER STORIES promises greater things than have been.

A thumb hand sketch of the contents re October 1947 issue. Rated as per mention, first comes:

DONOVAN HAD A DREAM—*By James Mac Creigh.* Filled with adventure and exciting action, this swift moving story finishes with the usual "lived happily ever after" end.

THE DARKER DRINK—*By Leslie Charteris.* Bears the same exceptional high quality that all of this author's writings have had. Bearing on possible truth, Author Charteris has woven a yarn that leaves the reader guessing to the very end.

THE TIME TWISTER—*By Francis Flagg & Weaver Wright.* A well woven story with a surprise ending.

PROBATE—*By Margaret St. Clair.* A well executed story defining the meaning of the title. A fair concept of righteousness.

JERRY IS A MAN—*By Robert A. Heinlein.* Concept of a probable episode happening in the future. The author has argued his case well, and had me, for one, convinced of his court-room argument.

EXIT THE PROFESSOR—*By Manly Wade Wellman.* The interesting antics of a secluded Kentucky family, and the resultant happenings to the investigating professor makes enjoyable reading.

THE TONGUE CANNOT TELL—*By Manly Wade Wellman.* Apparently the dictionary of earth languages has need of a lot improvements, if this story is to be taken seriously. Because this yarn does little more than state man's inability to know of wonders he has not seen, it doesn't rate, in my category, more than "passable" enjoyment.

As for illustrations, they were all tops, and true depictations of events in the story. The reader speaks is, as usual, good reading. A diversified group of opinions offers a lot of "food for thought".

It is with interest I note the excellent lineup for next issue. I look forward with feverish anticipation, when the next issue of TWS will once again be my companion for enjoyable reading pleasure.—*HQ SQ, 6th Fighter Wing, APO # 832, c/o PM., New Orleans, La.*

Send in another puff like that, John, and we'll have to work you in on a space-rate basis. My goodness!

TOM'S TREAT
by Tom Jewett

Dear Mr. Editor: When I saw the cover of the October TWS I knew I was in for a treat; Bergey had toned down his woman-interest and illustrated the story instead of exhibiting his questionable skill at leg art. Furthermore, you weren't merely bragging when you said this, the October ish, was a pretty high star in the galaxy of TWS issues

From a high high to a low high, the stories were as follows: JERRY IS A MAN, by Heinlein, is a neat little thing with a high-powered plot; DONOVAN HAD A DREAM, by MacCreigh, was a nicely written action tale, and the inconclusive ending leads into a sequel; THE DARKER DRINK, by Charteris, is this author's usual light breezy style but too light and breezy for a *good* fantasy; two equally good stories were THE TIME TWISTER, by Flagg and Wright, an amusing and well-written little tale with a catchy ending, and THE TONGUE CANNOT TELL, by Wellman, which shows how much you can say about something without saying anything. Good.

Least of all the stories were PROBATE, by St. Clair, whose writing is so sketchy that it just doesn't make an impression, and EXIT THE PROFESSOR, by Kuttner, which sounded like a rough first draft snatched up to round out an issue. It seems to me that Kuttner could have put the story in the third-person instead of the first, thus following the plot logically and at the same time using some of his marvellous descriptions, which a hill-billy couldn't rightly do.

Finlay's illustrations on pages eleven and sixty-six were the best, and his others merely good. Stevens' page 46-47 was good, and the Marchioni on page 83 was good! Much better than his usual run-of-the-dry-brush stuff. He can do a good job, given the time. The Napoli on page 91 was okay, but isn't that stretching it a little too far? Her nether limb, that is. Kiemle on page 61 was very good, the white-on-black treatment very effective. Kiemle on page eighty only fair.

Frances Laub's idea for an amateur artists contest sounds good and I approve, but I hardly think you'd get many entries even remotely comparable to commercial artists' standards. Maybe a stefnistic cartoon contest would work out okay, because it isn't so much the artwork that counts. Blank India ink on standard typewriter paper, because heavy art-board isn't available to every would-be cartoonist. But would you care to take on the additional work?—*670 George St., Clyde, Ohio.*

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Frankly, Tom, we've been studying the art contest scheme with considerable interest, especially since the fanzine contest went blooey. However, after our recent experience with amateur contributions, to say nothing of the old amateur fiction contest, we have reluctantly decided against the art deal, mostly for reasons which you have stated concisely above.

Instead, we are going to stand by the Science Fiction Book Review, to give TWS a department balance comparable to that of STARTLING STORIES, with its THE ETHER VIBRATES and the FANZINE REVIEW. And the way book publishers are sprouting of late, we have high hopes for this department.

ARSENIC AND ARACHNIDS
by Russell Harold Woodman

Dear Editor: The October issue of TWS amazed me and pleased me and irritated me no end. The cover could have been better, I think. The letter column had a decently varied scattering of wits and opinions.

It was, by the wayside, my first encounter with TWS.

DONOVAN HAD A DREAM was rather nightmarish, but I did admire some of the characterization.

JERRY IS A MAN deserves (I say this seriously) to be made into a movie. The monkey that stars in the Tarzan pictures would be the perfect "Jerry". The trouble *is that Hollywood has no sense of humor.* They have to turn out pictures with at least twelve good sized corpses in them. When a girl kisses a man in them, she at once steps back and pulls a rifle out of her purse and tries to kill him too. Don't you agree, sir, that we numerous science fictions fans should be able to get some science fiction in motion *pictures also, without being Ruck Bogerish about it?*

Tell Bob Heinlein that, for my money, he has come up with something pretty darned swell, a classic short story. Forget the drips who wander vaguely around and save this Universe and that, and give us more wonderful off-trail short stories.

I started the tale by Leslie Charles Bowyer Lin—known better as Leslie Charteris—and gave it up, thinking how nice it'd be to ship you a package of arsenic tablets and arachnids for printing such a terrible thing and offending this old friend of the Ungodly Saint. Charteris used to be a stained ivory writer with plenty of humor and talent, but he is *rapidly becoming a hack's hack.*

THE TIME TWISTER was fair. Only fair.

Manly Wade Wellman is apparently unable to forget he won the first Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine contest. He's writing better and better. Wellman's The Tongue Cannot Tell is saturated with proof that he is an ever-evolving, endlessly eerie master of the Pen. *Lordy, Lordy, give us more.*

The guy or gal or combination guy-gal who drew the illustration for Jerry Is A Man certainly knows his or hers or his-hers stuff!

Henry Kuttner's "Exit The Professor", rank junk. Whew! Phew! Awkrp! Give him an A for Awful.

I'll cut this note short so you can squeeze more TWS lovers and laughers into the Reader column.

My final words—the best trick-photography movie ever filmed carried the onlooker back to the past and is worth terming science fiction. It was One Million, B. C. and is by this time historic as the sinking of the Titanic.—*505 A Washington Avenue—Apt. 7, Portland 3, Maine.*

Well, about all we can say in reply to this vitriol is that the Heinlein opus was a novelet, not a short story. Oh, and that the illustrator for same story was Vern Stevens. For the rest, Woodman, you obviously never spared a tree in your life.

TIME-KEEPER
by Rex E. Ward

Dear Editor: The Saint in science-fiction! Of course I had known this from the forecast in the last issue, but nevertheless the surprise was overwhelming. The story itself was magnificent, and easily places first—but tell me, is my suspicion true? Is Charteris really a pen-name of Hank Kuttner?

"The Time Twister" by Flagg and Wright (Wright, Wright,—I can't quite place that name) was second, chiefly because it was a time yarn and I'm crazy about time yarns. That's why I published Time Travel Tales for four issues. I still regret having to give it up, but it was boring quite a hole in my pocketbook, and material on that subject was hard, very hard, to obtain. Anybody want to take it over? I hate to see it die. But Flagg has been dead for years—did Wright (???) finish a yarn of Flagg's that Flagg had not finished before his death? Explanation, please.

The novel, "Donovan Had a Dream," by James MacCreigh, was very well-written, and I liked the idea. MacCreigh is an old-timer, and old-timers can always be expected to turn out a bell-ringer. The story was great—but those illustrations by Finlay! They leave me breathless.

"Jerry Is a Man," by Heinlein was excellent science-fiction. I wonder why Mr. Heinlein has been selling to TWS and SS so often lately?

Wellman is usually very good, and "The Tongue Cannot Tell" was no exception. I liked it, and thought the ending well-handled.

Kuttner's bit was good, not up to Hank's standard though.

Margaret St. Clair's "Probate" passable—in fact, quite good.

The new department, "Science-Fiction Book Review", which seems to have replaced the "Meet the Authors" section, was very good this time. It is obvious that you are a very good reviewer. You are *not afraid to say the book is poor (if it is) and on the* other hand you give credit where credit is due.

I liked "The Legion of Space"; I have book number 120, signed by Jack himself. (Yes, I'm bragging!) It was space-opera—but I still contend that that is the best kind of science-fiction—I might say the *only* true science-fiction. But you have the ability to give *your readers both sides of the story—the good side* and the bad side.

"The Reader Speaks" is getting better and better—as is the whole magazine, for that matter. Best letter was Sneary's, by far. I get around to see him quite often. Manchester bus runs right from my door to his. I look forward to those little get-togethers with much anticipation.

If you *really* want to attract attention to your mag (and of course you do) why don't you have an all-black cover, with a white circle, or skull, or something of the sort in the center of the blackness? That'd really go over, don't you think?

As to the problem of what follows matter-transmitters. I should think it would be some method of thought-transmission. You think to yourself, "I'd like to be on Mars," and presto! You're on Mars. Of course you were on Earth when you thought this—or some other planet. I can offer no explanation as to how these thought-transmitters would work. Anybody have any ideas?

Here's a little paradox I thought up the other day, which should start something. Mr. Smith is born in 1960. His mother dies with his birth, and two weeks later his father dies from an injury. His father tells his best friend, whom he met ten years ago, to take care of his child through life. His best friend does so. Mr. Smith invents a time-machine in 1990, when he is thirty years old, and goes back to 1950, ten years before he was born.

His machine crashes, and is beyond repair, for a certain metal that he needs to repair his machine has not been invented yet—or discovered, more accurately. He meets his mother and father, and of course does not know them, as they both died when he *was young; and of course they do not know him be*cause—Well! He is forced to live with them, and becomes his father's best friend. Then he is born and is asked by his father to take care of himself—

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which he does, and therefore is very flawlessly bringing himself up!

Can anyone find anything wrong with this paradox? Well, it should prove of some interest to see what some of the reactions are.—*428 Main Street, El Segundo, California.*

No, Charteris is not another Kuttner penname. Tsk, tsk! You should know better, Rex. Your little time machine problem is intriguing. But we seem to remember Samuel Mines covering pretty much the same problem in his FIND THE SCULPTOR, published in this magazine some issues back. At any rate, being your own parent and offspring at once is enough to drive the Oedipus-complex lads wacky—and should have provided a lyrical field day for the late great Sir W. S. Gilbert.

OOH—THAT SNEARY!
by Jerri Bullock

Dear Editor: First I'll tell you what I thought of the Oct. TWS, and then, *and then* I'm going to call that Sneary some bad names! He really burned me with that egotistical letter of his. (Bring to a boil and, gr-r-r, simmer slowly.)

In my last letter I said the short stories weren't too hot; well, in this issue, you called me a liar. Yep, the shorts were darn good this time, with the exception of "The Time Twister." Too bad, though, that St. Clair couldn't have made hers a novelet; it had great possibilities.

Well, I've read the Saint's adventures for many a year, but this one really made me sit up and take notice! A mite on the impossible side, but very good. "Donovan Had A Dream", of course, was the best in the ish, but "Jerry Is A Man" was a *very* close second. The only thing, in my opinion, that kept it from taking first place, was that it wasn't quite the type of story you usually print. It was interesting and I think Heinlein really has something to offer in the way of future stories.

Now to take that "SWIPE" at Rick, as he put it. Listen, egg-head, we femms do *not* say the same thing! And as far as none of us being active fans, I've a little bone to pick with you on that score. If you hare-brained males didn't take up so much room in the column, maybe we gals would have a chance to get more of our letters printed.

I've written quite a few times, and read TWS and SS for the last few years, and I think I only had one letter printed! (Please don't blue-pencil this, Ed., let me tell him off.) Your letters have become a part of TWS and S, but how about giving someone else a chance to get in on the fun instead of just finding fault, Mr. Sneering Sneary.

Congratulations, Frances Laub for bringing up something I've often wanted to suggest. (I just never had the nerve.) I, too, am an "artiste", they tell me; I think your idea of an amateur art contest is wonderful! If I couldn't draw better than Marchioni, I would give up! So, Ed., how about it?—*22200 Lemon Ave., Hayward, Calif.*

Poor Rick—egg on his head, eh? We bleed albumen for him. But it does seem to us we have run more than one of your missives, Jerri. We *like* femme fans, even though none of them has yet come up with Sneary's spelling.

POEM DE TERRE
by Marion "Astra" Zimmer

Dear Editor: Now, don't forget, you ASKED—almost begged— for poetry. So don't complain at what

[*Turn page*]

REDUCE FAT!
UP TO 5lbs. A WEEK
YET EAT PLENTY!

The New, Scientific Way to
LOSE WEIGHT
Feel full of pep and energy. Overcome that tired feeling this Doctor Approved Way!

NO STARVING
NO EXERCISE
NO LAXATIVES
NO DRUGS
NO MASSAGE
Absolutely HARMLESS and Actually GOOD FOR YOU!

REDUCE
10-20-30 LBS.
AND IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH!
WE GUARANTEE THESE STATEMENTS OR YOU
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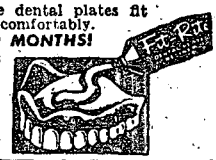

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YE OLDE OCTOBERE ISSUE OF TWS

When Jimmy MacReigh writes of *Donovan's Dream*
I throw down the mag with a shuddering screan
For the "Hags" and the "Donovans" leave me so cold
That I feel about ready to dive 'neath the mold.

Not so when Rob Heinlein proves *Jerry's a Man*
(Via Stephen S. Foster) as only *he* can.
But *The Tongue Cannot Tell* what I think of the goon
Who would write all that JUNK about what's on the moon.

Now Leslie the Charteris makes of this ish
As fine a collection as ever I wish
And with illustrations by Finlay, no less
The Saint is my favorite, doing his best.

And the twist at the end had a wonderful punch.
But *miss St. Clair's Probate* affected my lunch.
And when Flagg and Wright turn out a time-travel THING
That's as old as the hills, why, my interest takes wing.

Hank Kuttner, he enters; the world takes a spin.
Hank, I LOVE you! How DID this weird story get in!
I popped both my tonsils; my teeth all fell out
With laughing; best yarn in the ish, there's no doubt.

So Pen-pal Rick Sneary now writes "Deathless prose."
HURRY! Those who panned him made me hold my nose.
And I'm glad you're defending the Guy from the Gate.
Now; about that art contest; I simply can't wait

To see the fan artists send in their stuff.
I'll send one myself, if you can't get enough.
Oh horror! That last thought has made ye Ed faint!
(Gee! I CAN'T find a rhyme! And I've *mentioned* the Saint!)

However the Saint can stand re-mention. Thanks again for a wonderful story about a character I loved long before my fanning days. More, please. What a NICE speedboat Bergey drew on the cover. When will Chris-Craft start stocking those ? ? ?—*R.F.D. # 1, East Greenbush, New York.*

'Twas a nice hunk of doggerel, Astra, old thing
Though some of your verdicts make Ed want to swing.
You're away off on Donovan, on PROBATE too
Your art contest ideas are laced with mildew.

But because of your sentiments, neatly expressed
Toward Jerry and Leslie, we forgive the rest
And now just because you found Kuttner so great
We are going to award you a new dental plate.

BLOOD PRESSURE RISING
by Tom Pace

Dear Ed: Surrounded as I am by studies, the like of which I have not seen since early in school, I had not thought to be writing another fan letter any time soon. But here in my hands is what I have been thinking of as the "dream issue" of TWS, and it is demanding an outburst. . . .

The outstanding reaction I had to this issue, even before I read it was a feeling of astonishment. Just before I came to Tech, I reread some of my older issues of TWS, and some going back only a few years. It is amazing that a magazine can change

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so much in only three or four years.

The cover is "new period Bergey" . . . and that listing of interior delights, while it didn't do anything to increase the beauty of Earle K.'s work (something should) raised my blood pressure a good deal.

The interior illustrations . . . well, Finlay, Kiemle, and Whoozit on page 46 . . . all I have to say is . . . (ah, hackneyed essence of hackneyed phrases) . . . well. Finlay is to me the perfection point in Stfantasy. Surely, the story is the thing, not the illustration (As I believe you once pointed out), but Finlay's pix illustrate, not the story itself, but the *mood* of the story. . . .

It would be strange indeed if we find out (say in 1965) that Martians do look like Finlay pix. . . .

The story I would rank first in this issue is Manly Wade Wellman's short story, *The Tongue Cannot Tell*. Wellman hasn't done anything like this in a long, long while. No one has.

Second . . . Charteris' *The Darker Drink*.

This, like Wellman's, is a story that takes much reading. At first reading, which was (I am ashamed to say) somewhat hurried, I was a little disappointed. The writing was, it seemed to me, off Charteris' usual style and skill and perfection. . . .

But then I read through it a second time, and I got it . . . the dreamlike, nightmare like pattern . . . it was shaded in two dimensional, over-bright colors in places . . . because that is how a dream is, over-bright, flat, and a trifle confused. But behind the nightmare like quality lay the bright, faint pattern of Charteris' magic-weaving. He's a good one for that. His style is easily adaptable to fantasy . . . is not the Saint perfect fantasy?

Third, Heinlein's *Jerry Is A Man*. If Heinlein keeps up, he will raise the SatEvePost up to the level of TWS, eh? I sense a sequel coming. Am I right?

Kuttner's *Exit The Professor* was with a difference. A little more serious treatment, and a little expansion and there could be a good novelet on the Hogbens. . . .

Donovan Had A Dream was a very well-written action story. Both Flagg and Wright's *Time Twister* and St. Clair's *Probate* were "in the mood" (Glenn Miller and stf!). . . .

The letters . . . Hmm.

One thing . . . I, for one, would like to speak in defense of Bud Gregory. Most of the politicians, educators, militarists, theorists, scientists, and just plain people in the world are exactly like Gregory, to a lesser degree . . . they are fairly well advanced technologically, but ignorant of social sciences . . . they can't get along with the next-door neighbors, but the lady of the house can drive and perhaps fly a lightplane while the man can repair radios or fix electric motors or argue finer points of mathematics.

Gregory has a genius for nuclear physics and electronics; but cannot get along without causing some kind of disturbance in even a loosely organized social setup. Man's ability to get along with other men ought to be the basis of I.Q. tests, rather than his ability to comprehend and apply mathematical or scientific priciple, or his ability to learn such things when starting from scratch.

Well, this was a dream issue, all right. If you put the dream back about 1943, it's *really* one! And the next, with another Kuttner novel, looks even better. . . .

Those guys who used to talk about the Old Golden Age of Stf . . . where are they now? How many of them would rather read a 1933 Wonder than a 1947 TWS?

And WHY does George Ebey feel that Fitzgerald should be ashamed of the Bud Gregory stories? That's a direct question, George. Why?—*Box 1693, Ga. Tech., Atlanta, Ga.*

Nice to hear from you again, Tom, after too long an absence—and even nicer to hear that you approve of our current status et cet. Incidentally, thanks for your defense of the Gregory. He has, I believe, one more novelet due to appear shortly before he finishes running his course.

Incidentally, for those interested, Kuttner's Hogbens were conceived with complete in-

[*Turn page*]

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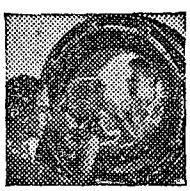

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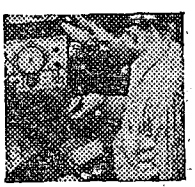

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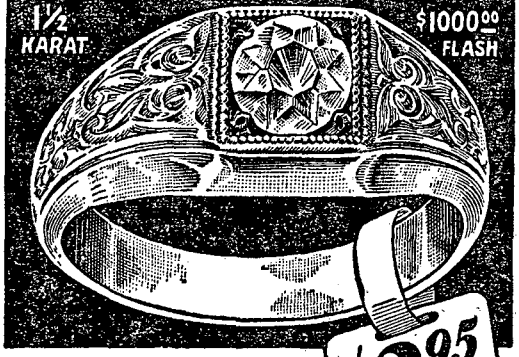

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dependence of Fitzgerald's hillbilly genius. Gregory was largely worked out across a luncheon table, but the amazing Hogbens were not even thought of here until Kuttner walked in with the manuscript. So if it's a trend, don't ask us how it got started.

WHERE'S MEHITABLE?
by Charles Douglass

dear sir

i feel that i can now trust my
emotions
so that i may write to you without being sued
for slander that is
my first comment about your mag is to paraphrase a
quote
never have
so
many expected so much and gotten so little i
mean leslie charteris s story
i thought you said it was going to be a sf story
jerry is a man was so good it deserves a punctionation mark thus
!
the only other story worth commenting on
is the tongue cannot tell it was good
as for art work bergey took the honers even without
a bem
and his illustration for jerry is a man was
a classic
and now we turn to the reader speaks
sneary and i both see eye to eye on at
least one point that being gregory
i dont like him either so there too
rex ward to that makes it unanimous
frances laubs idea for pic hacks is the best i have seen
in your colume since
my last letter
before i close i would like to congratulate the sf book
review for a
job well done
keep up the good work
so now i
will say goodbye
so i will say it goodbye goodbye goodbye goodbye
goodbye goodbye goodbye goodbye
1236 crittenden st nw
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bibbledy bibbledy bibbledy bibbledy bibbledy bibbledy bibbledy
and how sir could you so violate
the work of the late
great don marquis in its archiest form
to such ignoble purpose
again bibbledy bibbledy bibbledy bibbledy
bibbledy bibbledy bibbledy.

HOW POSTWAR CAN YOU GET?
by Jack Clements

Dear Ed: Now you've done it! You've carried this post war improvement thing too far. In case you're wondering what I'm talking about, take a look at the cover on the October TWS. Look at the neat lettering, the nice illustration, and the fine color scheme. Man, that's the best thing Bergey's done for I don't know how long.

The inside illustrations also were a magnificent batch of loveliness. Finlay and Stevens, yum.

The lead novel this time was okay, but could have been better. The plot was kinda hackneyed in some ways, but it did have a few nice twists to it.

Much much better was the Charteris opus. This is to be expected, as I think the Saint is the greatest character in modern fiction, except maybe Orphan Annie. Though I've read better Saint epics, this wa a delightful bit of Templarism.

I think Tom Pace asked for a Saint story some

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time ago. Glad his request was answered, but don't let it stop here.

The rest of the line-up is great. Look at those names.

Heinlein, Wellman, Kuttner, Flagg, St. Clair. Wowee! (pronounced glug). How good can you get?

The reader is speaking in a much better manner this time, what with those two madmen of madcap, Ward and Clements around.

The book review was interesting, and as usual you were not too enthusiastic over the item under observation. Seems that to really get raves, a book would have to be written by one Ye Editor.

One thing I like about TWS is your policy of using so many swell time travel yarns. Besides the fact that they are about the most thought-provoking type of stf, they also help out a lot on my "Time Warp" column in 2000 A.D. (A double plug), which reviews the current t-t stories.

Say, who is this fellow, Johnnie Marvin. Really a nice sense of humor there. I'm referring to his letter, of cawse. Thot I finished with TRS in the sixth (my my indentations) pargirraffe. Well, I don't. Marvin refers to the fellow who fell in love with the kitchen sink. I know a kitchen sink that fell in love with a man, but alas, the man was unresponsive, as he was going with a refrigerator at the time. A very sad case.

I have solved the problem of the matter transmitter receiving itself. As it would take at least a fraction of a second to pass through a transmitter, simply go into the future to that fraction of a second after the time the transmitter has transmitted itself, and bring the transmitter with you. Or maybe it would be better to build two transmitters. Better still, take a train.—*6310 Madison Rd., Cincinnati 27, Ohio.*

It seems to us that we have already pretty thoroughly covered that book review business. As a matter of fact Ye Ed has written a number of tomes on this and that, thinks so highly of them that he has not a single copy on his own shelves—and this despite the fact that some of them have sold well both here and abroad. So don't be picking on us, Jack. We're just as tough on ourselves.

We agree it would be better to take a train, preferably a lovely lady's. Next. . . . !

COMMENT ON OCTOBER ISSUE
by James Hamilton Jr.

Dear Editor: Just thought I'd submit my comments on the October issue of TWS. The artwork and the letters I will pass over in the interests of brevity. On to the stories. . . .

First, DONOVAN HAD A DREAM. Best in the issue. MacCreigh is coming up fast. But where are Sterling and Cross? And Edmond Hamilton has been almost a stranger of late.

Next THE TONGUE CANNOT TELL. One of Wellman's best. Enough said.

Third, JERRY IS A MAN. Heinlein in top form.

THE DARKER DRINK by Leslie Charteris shows the author's lack of familiarity with the field. Keep him coming.

EXIT THE PROFESSOR. Ye Gods—and to think this was written by the same man who contributed SWORD OF TOMORROW, THE DARK WORLD et al to your growing gallery of classics! Oh, well, anybody that can write as many good stories as Hank has produced to date and—I trust—will keep on producing, is entitled to an occasional lapse such as this.

THE TIME TWISTER by Flagg and Wright reads as if they had hired the barbarian to whom they refer to write it for them. Who the heck is Weaver Wright?—*Fitzsimones General Hospital, United States Army, Denver, Colorado.*

Well, James, we can't agree with you about the Kuttneropus, as we have already stated.

[*Turn page*]

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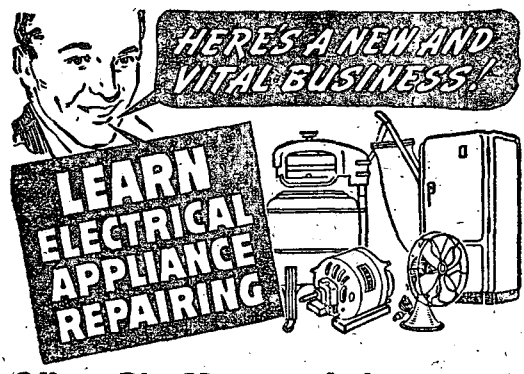

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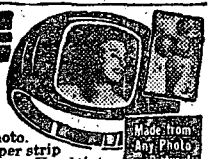

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We think he is equally as competent at provoking laughter as he is at creating matchless moods of magic. You've been reading Sterling (which is a nom de plume) without knowing it, of course. Hamilton recently sent us a fine lead novel for SS which we as promptly purchased. He'll be around. His father's illness has hampered his production to some extent, but you'll be seeing more of him soon.

BROWN STUDY
by Alvin R. Brown

Dear Editor: Most peculiarly the stories in the Oct. '47 issue of TWS can be lumped in two categories, either very good of very bad. Simply lumping them in their various categories I find that the following are very good; Jerry Is A Man, Donovan Had A Dream and The Darker Drink and that the following are very bad; all the rest (too much trouble to write out the separate titles).

Your art is very good, none of the artists being the slightest bit offensive to my weary eyes this issue. The cover isn't too bad considering Bergey did it, but someone ought to tell the young damsel that she is going to be deader than a mackerel inside of seconds if she doesn't look where she's going. These women drivers!

Constructive criticism: your short story writers aren't consistent and in the way of a suggestion either improve them or simply publish more novelets. Seems as if the present stock of short story scribes can't maneuver within the confines of their chosen work. This criticism can and probably will precipitate a juicy argument but there is my stand, take it or leave it.

Evidently my last letter was taken by some to be of the feuding variety. It wasn't meant to be. It was simply in REBUTTAL to Miss Moorehead's rather cutting remarks about letterhacks. Frankly some of the letters make better reading than some of the stories.

The Reader Speaks continues on its merry way and is rapidly rounding out as one of the best reader columns in the field.

One Question, is George Ebey the same one that's an AVCer and I believe Nat'l Vice Chairman of said organization as per the AVC Bulletin? How about it, George?—*139-29 34 Road, Flushing, N. Y.*

You make us feel like that little girl with the little curl et cetera, Alvin. As for stories, we are very definitely limited by the quality of those our authors produce. And we are constantly seeking to strengthen our string

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THE MAN WITH THE POE
by Dan McLeod

Dear Editor: I have been reading TWS off and on for some time now, and I am finally moved to comment by your October edition. It seems to be one of the best to date.

First, the stories: Donovan Had a Dream. This story was the only flaw in an otherwise excellent edition. It was a combination of two stereotypes: the super-science story and the Captain Fury variety. Together or separately, these themes can produce run of the mill stories at best.

Jerry Is A Man. A light and amusing story of the perils of the future. A new theme, to me at least, and very well done.

The Darker Drink. This story completely overshadows the others. Only adjectives of the superlative degree could do justice to it. In a field new to him, Charteris has outdone himself. Let's have more of this.

The Time Twister, Probate, and The Tongue Cannot Tell were merely good—very good.

Exit the Professor. At first, I thought this was going to be another of the Gawd-awful Bud Gregory stories. Not so. Kuttner, as usual, had a surprise. This fantastic bit of fantasy was excellent.

That cheese cake on the cover—why?

So much for the stories. In the letters section you made a crack which I cannot allow to pass unchallenged. The point you attempted to make, if I understood correctly, was that Poe's stories are read today not because they are classics, but they are examples of the primitive in fantasies.

Here, I must beg to differ. Poe was also a primi-

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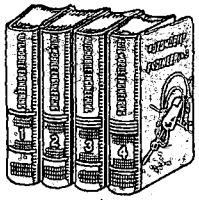

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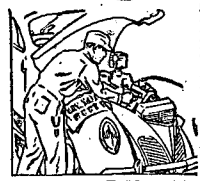

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tive in science-fiction. Who today reads "The Wonderful Adventures of Hans Pfall", "Mss. Found in a Bottle", or "A Flight Across the Atlantic" as examples of the primitive in science fiction or for any *other reason*?

He was also a primitive in humor. Who has read lately "Never Bet the Devil Your Head", "The System of Dr. Tarr and Professor Fether", or "Spectacles"?

My counterpoint is this: That when a piece of literature ceases to be interesting in itself, it ceases to be read, and does not remain as an interesting example of the primitive. People still thrill to Poe's tales of the occult and the macabre, where he was not only a primitive but a master.

It was a fine issue nonetheless. Keep up the good work.—*Co G, S T R, Ft. Monmouth, N. J.*

Re your remark about cheese cake on the cover—why not?

HYDE AND NO SEEK
by Gene A. Hyde

Dear Editor: Well, well, time to write another letter to T.R.S. Seems this happens about every two months, doesn't it—or had you noticed?

I had to fortify myself with a few bottles of coke before I could look at the contents page this issue. I finally took a deep breath and looked—looked and breathed a sigh of relief. Why? Its simple; no Bud Gregery novel, short, short short or short short short. In short, no B. G. at all.

And speaking of B. G., I'll make a few comments *on your editoral. I have nothing against Gregory as* a character (I admit that a Bud Gregory is possible). My complaint is with the stories themselves. Look. out of three B. G. yarns he has twice saved the United States from an atomic war of one sort or another. It seems to me that there must be someother pastime for Bud. It must get pretty boring, saving the U.S. all of the time.

Now that I have that off my chest, let's turn to the stories.

O.K., we've turned, and what do we find? We find a three-way tie for first place. Said tie being between Heinlein, Charteris, and Kuttner. The way I list the names is no indication of my preferance. I have none. They all came in even.

After reading the first Heinlein yarn you printed, I thought to myself, "If this is an example of Heinlein's post-war work, He'd better commit suicide before some fan commits murder." After reading "Jerry Was A Man" though I take back everything I thought.

I never expected to see the Saint in s.t.f., but now that I have, I say let's have some more.

The other stories came in in the folllowing order: "Donovan Had A Dream", "Probate", "The Tongue Cannot Tell" and "The Time Twister". The last is a good example of the type of stf, and I use the term loosely, that makes me wish I'd never started reading the stuff. Why any author wants to waste a perfectly good plot by writing it in that very much overworked manner is beyond me.

"Probate" was good, and would have ranked at least second in almost any other ish, but the rest of the yarns were too good in this one.—*915 N. Main St., Bloomington, Ill.*

It's a good thing Bud Gregory has twice saved the US from atomic destruction. If he hadn't, where would we all be?

THRILLED!
by Ed Farnham

Editor: Have just finished reading the October

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Thrilling Wonder Stories and, for a wonder, I was thrilled.

The Reader Speaks, was, to my way of thinking, much better than in some time. According to Rick Sneary, you are a great big likeable (censored). Hmmm! Seems that I am *not* the only fatty who reads our beloved mag.

It has been so hot here in Chi that even the horse flies are too hot to bite. Nevertheless, I could not wait to see what was in store for me and dug right into ol' TWS.

I liked Donovan Had A Dream—MacCreigh. Think it was tops this ish.

Jerry Is A Man—Heinlein. Werry goot. Jerry is a good deal smarter than some of the hack letter writers whose works I've seen in TWS. (ouch).

The rest of the stories were ok but never did care for shorts as they end too quickly. The October issue, in general, is ok. More please?

I am two up on Rick as re British fans. One in Somerset and one in Fridaybridge Camp in England. We swap letters and opinions as re TWS and Startling Stories, in some of which Ye Ed has received a panning and in others, compliments. Never will forgive you for knocking out the old Sarge, tho. Sure do miss thet guy.

Say—wots all th' fuss about Bergey??? Seems to me there is little fault to be found with him. None of us are *perfect*, and I wonder just how many of Bergey's critics could do ½ as good a job?

Say again—it has beena heckuva long time since the war ended and I'd like to know—where is Captain Future as he use to was, in a magazine of his own? Don't tell me there is a paper shortage!! That gag is as dead as Kilroy.

There are some of us who like the Gregory series—leave him alone, pliz!! So! Jim Kennedy don't like our Bergey? Sour grapes!! Bergey is the best in *any* mag on the market.

If all he can do is Pan, poor Jim is going to get a lot of Rejection Slips. I can show him a string three feet long. I call 'em my Short Snorts—From the Editor.

In closing this missive, I would like to see the elimination entirely of Fantasy. What are Thrilling Wonder Stories and Startling Stories, Ghost Story Rags??!!?? PPPHHHEEEWWWIIIEEE!!!—on Fantasy. *—1139 East 44th St., Chicago 15, Illinois.*

Failure to like good fantasy (No, don't say it, plizz) seems to us to reveal a lamentable lack of imagination. After all, the most highly technical pseudo science story is truly nothing but fantasy dressed up with a lot of fantastic, slide rule suppositional gadgets.

With which, we're bringing this department to an end before we get caught in another argument and run out of space. We'll be back in a couple of months to pick things up where you readers lay them down. So long until then.

—THE EDITOR.

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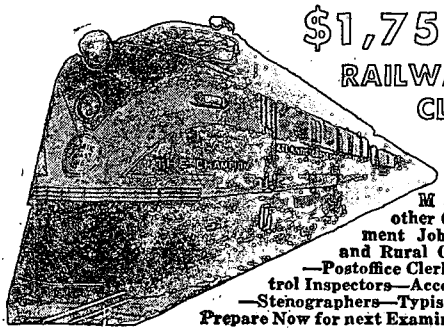

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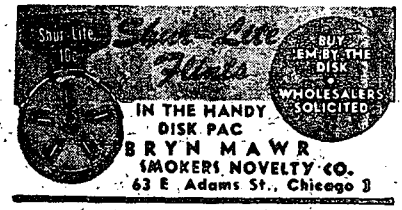

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SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW

DR. ERIC TEMPLE BELL, one-time instructor and fellow in mathematics at the University of Washington and author of the most important and highly technical books in his choosen field, to say nothing of such popular explanatory tomes for the layman as MEN OF MATHEMATICS and THE MAGIC OF NUMBERS, is a man of revered reputation in science fiction under the pen-name of John Taine.

His previously unpublished THE FORBIDDEN GARDEN (Fantasy Press, $3.00) is the latest entry in what is rapidly becoming a flood of stf volumes currently reaching an avid fan market. Once again, though not as conclusively as in his THE TIME STREAM (previously reviewed in this column), Dr. Bell-Taine proves his right to the semi-

legendary eminence he holds for followers of the fantastic skilfully presented via plausible pseudo-science.

In THE FORBIDDEN GARDEN Taine concerns himself with a fascinating subject—paleobotany apparently gone stark staring mad. Paleobotany, in case any of you feel inclined to doubt the existence of the word, is the study of plants of past geological eras. Here it leads Taine and his readers smack into a sort of radio-active Garden of Eden hidden deep in the mountains above the Vale of Kashmir.

A fictitious London seed house, something on the order of a super-Burpee's, is responsible for the discovery of this hidden Earth-cup of continuous mutants. It seems that an eerie hereditary persecution complex has been driving its owners insane with great regularity since 1100 A.D. The brother of the current owner, a Mr. Brassey who seems none too stable mentally himself, has succumbed to the family curse and apparently immured himself as a Hindu fakir.

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But before going completely off his rocker he has sent home a package of seeds which have driven the company botanists and visiting experts half crazy themselves. Only one of thousands of the strange seeds ever blooms —and that is a blue larkspur calculated to give rise to jealous mayhem in the seed business.

Convinced he is surrounded by spies, Mr. Brassey finally selects a couple of unimpeachable American field scientists, Vartan and Shane, to head his expedition to locate the source of the strange seeds in company with his personal secretary, Miss Driscott. Miss Driscott, needless to say, is sufficiently comely despite the shredded wheat sound of her name.

As the story develops it reveals—but only in fits and starts—that Scotland Yard, a rival seed outfit and a deep-laid Oriental conspiracy to wipe out the Western World also have representatives on the spot, each as eager to get hold of the mystery seeds for their own nefarious purposes as Brassey's trio.

So THE FORBIDDEN GARDEN develops into a rugged, high-wire tension adventure yarn almost on Rider Haggard lines, with nip and tuck going all the way and fascinating scientifictional premises and influences at work throughout. It is long—close to 100,000 words—and gives the reader his money's worth in excitement with compound interest in the way of fantastic speculation.

If we have any real fault to find, it is with the author's characterization. His cast of players comprise a collection of stock dramatic types and no more, with Miss Driscott suffering the most in this respect. She makes a somewhat better Campfire Girl than heroine. But adult human characterization, while missed, is not essential to a tale which depends upon intrigue, tremendous risks and a goodly load of plausible magic for its hold upon the reader.

Mr. Taine's treatment of the integrity of highly placed and trusted Scotland Yard operatives will give rise to chuckles and/or anguish on the part of detective story devotees among his readers. And his treatment of the madder of the Brasseys, when found, is as zanily satirical if a trifle wilder than anything yet to come from the typewriter of Mr. Evelyn Waugh. Mr. Taine, a Scotsman turned U. S. citizen, is no lover of the English as such.

THE FORBIDDEN GARDEN is beautifully printed, ably illustrated by A. J. Donnell and is a story well worth an evening or two of anyone's time.

—THE EDITOR.

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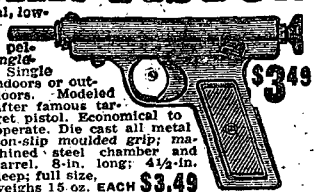

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THE SEVEN TEMPORARY MOONS

(Continued from page 71)

Murfree nodded. He let the space-going tank settle down to earth. It had been aloft for nearly four hours. Sunset was near. The wallowing, clumsy object landed on the weedy grass before the shack in which Bud Gregory lived. Bud crawled out of the manhole-turned-into-exit-port. Murfree, very pale and looking very sick, stayed inside. He backed out of the opening as Bud returned from the house with the portable radio in his arms.

"The radio's goin' crazy, suh," he said amiably. "All seven of those space-ships blew theirselves to pieces and folks are rejoicin'! But there was a lotta damage done today!"

Murfree completed his exit. He was paying out a length of string behind him.

"Do you want this thing?" he demanded, gesturing toward the swaddled, bulky monstrosity.

"No, suh. What'd I want with it?"

Then Bud Gregory gasped. Murfree jerked the string in his hand.

INSTANTLY the tank heaved itself free of the ground. There was a sudden violent surge of wind, and the cumbersome thing was hurtling skyward. It seemed to fall away from the earth. It vanished into the darkening night sky with a thin shrill whistling of wind about itself.

"I adjusted every pusher-beam to repel everything I could," said Murfree grimly. "It'll push away from water and air and iron and brass and aluminum and rock, and every sample of every material we had. It'll run away from the sun. It'll flee from every planet and every meteorite, and if there's any space-ship anywhere it will push away from that. It'll hunt for the farthest place in all the universe from any other particle of mat-

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ter! It will isolate itself forever."

Bud blinked. "Yes, suh," he faltered.

Then Murfree said wearily, "Those spaceships are destroyed, and if men made them, maybe the man who devised them. Whoever or whatever made them, won't dare that trick again!"

"No, suh," agreed Bud.

"So I'm going back East to my family," Murfree told him, "and try to forget all this. All the ambitions men ever had, we can realize, but we daren't, because men have the ambition to kill and enslave other men, too."

"Yes, suh, that's right," said Bud. He added hopefully. "You won't want me to make no more dinkuses, suh?"

"Never again!" said Murfree. "But you're rich, and your children, whenever they want to be. I won't bother you, though."

"Shucks!" said Bud cordially. "You ain't bothered me none, suh. You pay me ten dollars a day, and I can set and drink beer and eat hawgmeat and not worry about nothin'. Why don't you stay over a day or so and try it, suh?"

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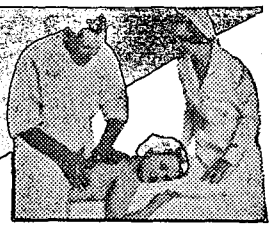

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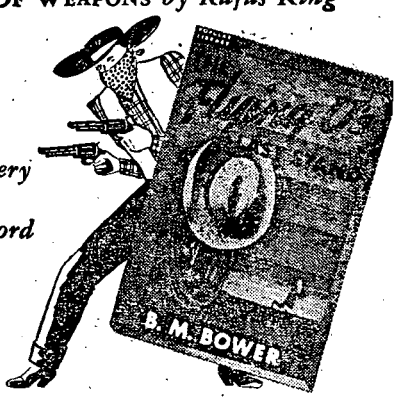

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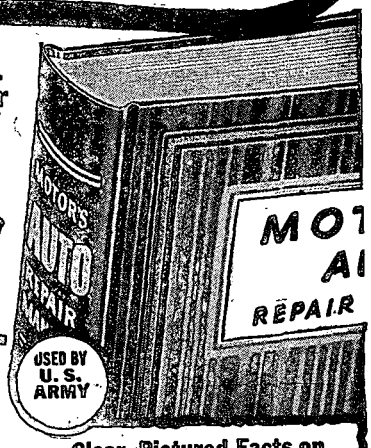

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